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DEIRDRÊ AND THE SONS OF USNA

DEIRDRÊ
AND THE SONS OF USNA

BY

FIONA MACLEOD

See
Sharp, William, 18

Portland, Maine
THOMAS B. MOSHER
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TO

ESTHER MONA

LITTLE girl, when you grow to maidhood and womanhood, it is a hope of mine that you will love these old legendary tales, of which the tale of Deirdrê and the Sons of Usna is one. Before you read this time-sweet story of great love you will come to the story of Fionnula and her brothers, because the Tale of the Children of Lir, or the Tale of the Four Swans as it is sometimes called, is first among the old beautiful stories for the delight of those standing in or passing beyond childhood. For a thousand years Gaelic youth has loved and wept over it. By many fires, by lonely seas, in hill-glens . . . in the great straths where of old was no change but the changing colour of season following season and where no strangers came save birth and death, but where the deer now have their wilderness or vast flocks browse where the smoke of crofts and homesteads rose . . . from generation to generation children, and maids and youths keeping children's hearts, have had their lives deep-

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ened in love and devotion, because of this tale of endurance noble to the end and of patience so great that the heart aches at the thought of it. You will hear much of the other virtues, dear: but do not forget these, which are so great, the stars of Christ . . . endurance and patience. It may help you to remember if you read of them in verse, as has been written in beauty . . .

Endurance is the noblest quality
And Patience all the passion of great hearts.

But, when you are older, I think there will be no tale of the high lift of love, of heroic love, to move you more than that now retold for you here, out of the dim beautiful past whose shadows sleep, in lengthening fans of twilight, across the sunset-lands of the imagination. It will not suffice that you care for it and its kindred as one cares for a flower that one plucks by the wayside, that one gathers at whim and idly discards. It will not suffice to like them as we like something which amuses us for a moment, a fantasy at a theatre, a light air lightly played or a song lifting itself from twilights of silence, this painted idyll of what never was, this facile romance of the obvious or the impossible. These are things of pleasantry, and are good, or may be good, each in its

kind: but they are not the things of the heart's desire, nor images of what the soul longs for and thirsts for.

But will you find anything of that which the soul longs for and thirsts for, will you find any unshaken or wavering image of your heart's desire, in the telling of an old tale? Many will ask that; some incredulously, some scornfully, some indifferently.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. It is of least moment what is in the tale: it is of moment what atmosphere of ideal beauty has remained with it out of the mind of the dreamer who shaped it, out of the love of generations for whom it has been full of a perpetual sweet newness as of summer-dawn, for whom it has been as fresh as moon-dew glistering on banks of thyme along old grassy ways. And it is of supreme moment what we ourselves bring: what every reader who would know the enchantment must bring, what you, dear, if you would know the enchantment, must bring.

Let me for a moment tell you something that bears upon what I say. Long ago, one of the old forgotten gods, the god of enchantment and illusion, made a glory that was a glory of loveliness, an ecstasy of sound, and a passion of delight. Then he watched seven mortals approach it in turn. Three saw in it

no loveliness, heard in it no ecstasy, caught from it no rapture. Of three others, one knew an inexplicable delight, and took away the wonder and the memory to be his while he lived: and one heard an ecstasy of sound, and went away rapt, and forgetting all things because of that dream and passion not seen but heard: and the third looked on that loveliness, and ever after his fellows spoke of him as one made insane by impossible dreams, though he had that in his life which rose in a white flame, and quenched his thirst at wells of the spirit, and rejoiced continually. But of the seven one only saw the glory as the god of enchantment and illusion had made it, seeing in it the spirit that is Beauty, and hearing in it the soul of Music, and uplifted by it to the rapture that is the passion of delight. And lest that evil Destiny which puts dust upon dreams, and silence upon sweet airs, and stills songs, and makes the hand idle, and the mind an eddying leaf, and the spirit as foam upon the sea, should take from this dreamer what he had won, the god of enchantment and illusion gave the man a broken heart, and a mind filled with the sighing of weariness, and sorrow to be his secret friend and the silence upon his pillow by night.

And I have told you this to help you to

understand that it is what we bring to the enchantment that matters more than what the enchantment may disclose. And, when you have been kissed by sorrow — may the darker veiled Dread pass you, dear — you will understand why the seventh dreamer who looked upon the secret wonder was of the few whom the gods touch with the hands, of the chosen keepers and guardians of the immortal fire.

No, it will not suffice that you care for them as a flower pluckt by the wayside, as a pleasure gathered in idleness, to be forgotten when gathered. You must come to these old tales to seek and to find the surviving beauty of gathered dreams and a silent world, the immortality of ideals treasured once, forgotten now. I do not say, I would not have you believe, for I do not so think, that all the old ideals of beauty have stolen away from the world, as twilight retreats from the grass in the pale greenness of dawns. But some have gone, or are changed and we do not know them: and some have dimmed. And, at least I think so, some are so rare now as to be seen only in a few hearts, like the star in a woodland pool seen among slim spears of reed. One does not look into many enchanted hearts in that uncertain wandering of ours between the lighting and the ashes of

the brief fire which we come to unknowingly, and carelessly tend, and regret with unavailing tears, and leave, cold. And I . . . I shall have bent above the fading warmth, and have risen at last, cold, and gone away, when that little wondering heart of yours shall have become a woman's heart: and so I do not know whether, if I were to look in it, I should see beyond the shaken reeds of the mind the depth-held star of the old passion of beauty, the old longing, the old enchantment. But I hope so. Are you not the child of her, that friend to whom I inscribed my first book; of whom, in its prefatory words, I wrote 'we have loved the same things and in the same way . . . take, then, out of my heart, this book of vision and dream.'

And so, if, carrying a heart such as I hope for you and believe is yours, little one, you will bring with you the enchanted secret, the enchantment in your mind, and look into that dim, beautiful enchantment of the past — of a world that ended, that changed long ago, and whose light endures as the travelling light of a star may immeasurably survive the star — I know you will find a compelling beauty in these old tales of the Gael, a beauty of thought against which to lay your thought, a beauty of dream against which to lay your

dream, a beauty of desire against which to lay your desire. For they are more than tales of beauty, than tales of wonder. They are the dreams of the enchanted spirit of man, achieved in beauty. Shall the day come when the tale of Deirdrê shall be no more told, when in the firelight moist eyes shall not deepen at the sorrows of Fionnula and her swan-brothers, when men's hearts and women's hearts shall not be quickened by the tale of Aillinn and Bailê Honeymouth, when the madness of Cuchulain shall not trouble, when the love of Emer shall not be the very fragrance of great love, when the song of Niamh shall not enchant?

If so, it is not merely beautiful children of legend we shall lose, not the lovely raiment, but the very beauty and love themselves, the love of beauty, the love of love, the old wondering ecstasy, the lost upliftedness, which once were an ancestral possession in an old simple primitive way, and now, or in that way, are no more ours, but are changed for us, as rainbows are changed upon the brows of cloud.

So, little one, come in time to love these things of beauty. Lay your child's heart, that is made of morning joy and evening longing, to that Mother-heart: and when you gather years, as now you gather the little

white clan of the grass, it shall be well with you. And you, too, when your time is come, and you in turn pass on the mystery of life to another who will look up from your breast with eyes of still wonder and slowly shaping thought, forget not to tell that other to lay its child's heart of morning joy and evening longing against a more ancient and dream-filled heart than that of any woman, that mother-heart of which I speak to you, the Heart of Beauty.

F. M.

DEIRDRÊ AND THE SONS OF USNA

"the story this
Of her, the morning star of loveliness,
Unhappy Helen of a western land."

"*Deirdrè.*" *Trs. by Dr. Douglas Hyde.*

DEIRDRÊ AND THE SONS OF USNA

In all the regions of the Gael throughout Scotland, and in every isle, from Arran and Islay in the south to Iona in the west and Tiree in mid-sea and the Outer Hebrides, there is no story of the old far-off days so well known as that of Deirdrê. In some places she is called Darthool, or Dartuil, or Darthray, or Darrathray (the last I have heard once only) but Deirdrê is the one name common to all the Gaels; and in Ireland to this day there is not a cowherd who has not heard of that queenly name.

Her beauty filled the old world of the Gael with a sweet, wonderful, and abiding rumour. The name of Deirdrê has been as a lamp to a thousand poets. In a land of heroes and brave and beautiful women, how shall one name survive? Yet to this day and for ever, men will remember Deirdrê, the torch of men's thoughts, and Grainne whom Diarmid loved and died for, and Maev who ruled mightily, and Fand whose white feet trod faery dew, and many another. For beauty

is the most unforgettable thing in the world, and though of it a few perish, and the myriad dies unknowing and uncaring, beneath it the nations of men move as beneath their pilgrim star. Therefore he who adds to the beauty of the world is of the sons of God. He who destroys or debases beauty is of the darkness, and shall have darkness for his reward.

The day will come when you will find a subtle enchantment in these names. They will bring you a lost music, a lost world, and imperishable beauty. You will dwell with them, till you love Deirdrê as did the sons of Usna, and would die for her, or live to see her starry eyes; till you look longingly upon the Grainne of your dreams, and cry as Diarmid did, when he asked her, as death menaced them, if even yet she would go back, and she answered that she would not: "Then go forward, O Grainne!"

Many poets and shennachies have related this tale. I have heard it given now this way, and now that; sometimes with new names and scenes, sometimes with other beginnings and endings; but at heart it is ever the same. Nor does it matter whether the father of Deirdrê be Felim, the warrior bard of the Ultonians, or Malcolm the Harper, or any other, or whether the fair and sweet beauty of the world be called Deirdrê or Darthool. But as

the name by which she is best known is Deirdrê, that I will call her.

I will tell the story as it is told in the old chronicles, and to this day, and if I add aught to it, that shall only be what I myself heard when I was young, and had from the lips of an old woman, Barabal Mac-Aodh, who was my nurse. She came out of Tiree or Coll, I forget which.

Well, in the old far-off days when Emania was the capital of the Ultonians, the bright-shining spear-guarded capital of the kingdom of Ulster, and before Maev, the queen of the south, had buried the chivalry of the north in dust and blood, there came into the realm of Concobar the Ultonian king, whom some call Conor and some Connachar, three of the noblest and fairest of the youths of the world. These are they who then bore, and in all the years since have borne, the name of the Sons of Usna, who was himself, some say, a feudal king, in Alba.[1]

It is because of these three heroes that this story I am relating is often called the story of the Sons of Usna. But first, I have that to tell you which precedes the time when Naois, and Ailne, and Ardan, stood in the house of Concobar the high king.

This Concobar was a great prince. He was

known as Concobar MacNessa, for though he was the son of Fatna the Wise, son of Ross the Red, son of Rory the high-king, Nessa his mother was a famous queen, and had indeed by her beauty and her wiles brought Concobar to the over-lordship of Uladh[2] when he was yet a youth.

In many of the tales of the old far-off days, you will hear the rumour of the splendour and wonder of the city of Emania. In Concobar's time it was called Emain Macha, for it had been built by a great and beautiful queen — Macha Mongruay, Macha of the Ruddy Hair. A thousand times have poets chanted of Emain Macha, and in the ancient days the bards loved to sing also of Macha herself. Here is an old far-off lay:

O 'tis a good house, and a palace fair, the dûn of Macha,
And happy with a great household is Macha there;
Druids she had, and bards, minstrels, harpers, knights,
Hosts of servants she had, and wonders beautiful and rare,
But nought so wonderful and sweet as her face, queenly fair,
O Macha of the Ruddy Hair!

The colour of her great dûn is the shining whiteness of lime,
And within it are floors strewn with green rushes and couches white,
Soft wondrous silks and blue gold-claspt mantles and furs

Are there, and jewelled golden cups for revelry by night:
Thy grianan of gold and glass is filled with sunshine-light,
O Macha, queen by day, queen by night!

Beyond the green portals, and the brown and red thatch of wings
Striped orderly, the wings of innumerous stricken birds,
A wide shining floor reaches from wall to wall, wondrously carven
Out of a sheet of silver, whereon are graven swords
Intricately ablaze; mistress of many hoards
Art thou, Macha of few words!

Fair indeed is thy couch, but fairer still is thy throne,
A chair it is, all of a blaze of wonderful yellow gold:
There thou sittest, and watchest the women going to and fro,
Each in garments fair and with long locks twisted fold in fold:
With the joy that is in thy house men would not grow old,
O Macha, proud, austere, cold.

Of a surety there is much joy to be had of thee and thine,
There in the song-sweet sunlit bowers in that place:
Wounded men might sink in sleep and be well content
So to sleep, and to dream perchance, and know no other grace
Than to wake and look betimes on thy proud queenly face,
O Macha of the Proud Face!

And if there be any here who wish to know more of this wonder,
Go, you will find all as I have shown, as I have said:

From beneath its portico thatched with wings of birds
blue and yellow
Reaches a green lawn, where a fount is fed
From crystal and gems: of crystal and gold each bed
In the house of Macha of the Ruddy Head.

In that great house where Macha the queen has her
pleasaunce
There is everything in the whole world that a man
might desire.
God is my witness that if I say little it is for this,
That I am grown faint with wonder, and can no more
admire,
But say this only, that I live and die in the fire
Of thine eyes, O Macha, my desire,
With thine eyes of fire![3]

It was in this wonderful forefront of Ulster that Concobar reigned. The fame of Emain Macha was throughout every country of the Gael; and there was no man or woman who, as the days went by, did not hear of the greatness of Concobar.

On a day of the days, the king went with his chief lords on a visit to the dûn of Felim, a warrior and harper whom he loved. There was to be great feasting, and all men were glad. Felim himself rejoiced, though he would have had the king come to him a few days later, for his wife was heavy with child, and looked for her hour that very day or the next.

In the midmost of the feast, Concobar saw that Cathba, an aged Druid who had accom-

panied him, was staring into the other world that is about us.

"Speak, Cathba," he said. "There is no man in all Erin who has wisdom like unto thine. What is it that thou seest, with the inner sight that I perceive well is now upon thee?"

"Old as I am with the heavy burden of years and sorrow, O Concobar, did I not beg that I might come with thee to this festival at the dûn of Felim? And that was not because I wearied to hear strange harping and singing, good and fine and better than our own as this harping is here, in the house of Felim; for I am old and weary, and care more to listen to the wind in the grass, or to the sighing upon the hill, than to any music of war or love."

"Then what was it that was in thy mind, Cathba?"

"This, O king. I saw a shadow arise whenever I thought of our Ultonian realm, and I felt within me the burden of a new prophecy. Nevertheless, my mind was silent till I entered the dûn of Felim, and now I know."

"Speak," said the king; while all there listened with caught breath, for Cathba was the wisest of the Druids, and knew many mysteries, and what he had foretold had

ever come to pass. Slowly, the white-haired Druid looked around the faces of all seated there. Then he looked at the king. Then he looked at Felim.

"To thee, O Felim, shall be born this night a sting, a sword, a battering-ram, and a flame."

Felim the Harper stared with wavering eyes, but said nothing. Of what avail to murmur against the decrees of the gods?

"This night shall that which I have said be born unto thee, O Felim. The sting will sting to madness him who is king of the Ultonians; the sword will sever from Uladh the chief of her glories, the Red Branch for which Concobar and all his chivalry shall perish; the ram shall batter down the white pride of Emain Macha; the flame shall pass from dûn to dûn, from forest to forest, from hill to hill, from the isles of Ara on the west to the shores of the sea-stream of the Moyle on the north, and to those of the sea of Manannan in the east."

Still Felim answered nothing. Then the king spoke:

"Thy words come in dust, like wind-whirled autumn leaves. We have not thy further sight, Cathba, and understand thee not."

Then once more Cathba spoke out of the dream that was upon him:

"Two stars I see shining in a web of dusk;

and, in the shadow of that dusk, a low tower of ivory and white pearls I see, and a strange crimson fruit; and through all and over all I hear the low, sweet murmur of the strings of a harp, a harp such as the Dedannan folk play upon in the moonshine in lonely places, but sweeter still, sweeter and more wonderful."

"Is this thy second vision one and the same with thy first, O Cathba?" asked the king.

"Even so. For the shining stars are her eyes, and the web of dusk is the flower-fragrant maze of her hair, that low tower of ivory is her fair, white, wonderful neck, and her white teeth are these pearls, and that strange crimson fruit is no other than her smiling mouth — a little smiling mouth with life and death upon it because of its laughter and grave stillness. As for that harp-playing, it is her voice I hear — a voice more soft and sweet and tender than the love-music of Angus Ogue himself. O shining eyes, O strange crimson fruit that is a little smiling mouth, O sweet voice that is more excellent to hear than the wild music of the Hidden People of the hills — it is of ye, of ye that I speak, and of thee, O tender, delicate fawn, in all thy loveliness."

None spoke or whispered, but all stared at the Druid. For dream was upon them at

these words, and each man imagined his desire, and was taken away by it, and was held in the enchantment of longing.

It was Concobar who broke the silence.

"Of whomsoever thou speakest, Cathba, she is surely of the divine folk. That exceeding loveliness is for the joy or the sorrow of the world."

Only Felim the Harper was troubled, for now he knew that the druid spoke of the unborn child whom even then his wife mothered. But no sooner had Concobar ceased than Cathba rose, with his eyes filled with flame and shadow beneath his white eye-brows. His voice was loud and terrible.

"Behold, I see this thing; behold the vision of Cathba the Druid, who is old and near death. And what is in the sight of my eyes is a sea, a sea of flowing crimson, a sea of blood. Foaming it rises, and wells, and overflows, and drowns great straths and valleys, and laves the flanks of high hills, and from the summits of mountains pours down upon the lands of the Gael in a thundering flood, blood-red to the blood-red sea."

But now the spell of silence was broken. All leaped to their feet, and many put their hands upon their swords. There was not one who did not fear the prophesying of Cathba

the Arch-Druid. That deluge of blood, was it not a terror, a great ruin to avert?

"If this child that the wife of Felim the Harper is to bear this night be a blood-bringer so terrible," they cried, "let us slay her at birth. For surely it is better to kill a child than to destroy a nation."

So they spoke out of their ignorance that they thought wisdom: not knowing that there is no thought, no power, no spell, no craft, wherewith to turn aside the feet of Destiny. For there is the fate that each makes for himself; and the fatality into which the soul enters as into a perilous kingdom; and the Destiny where the soul is deaf and blind.

For the first time since Cathba had prophesied, Felim uttered word.

"Listen, my kinsmen and fellow-knights of the Red Branch. A sore pity is it for my wife Elva to bear a daughter that shall be a sting to sting the king to madness, and a sword to sever the Red Branch from Uladh our fair heritage, and a ram to break down the walls of Emania, and a flame to consume the land from shore to shore. And as for that sea of blood, let it not be upon my head. For I, the father of the child of Elva, that Cathba says is to be a woman-child and of a beauty wonderful to see, say to you: That which ye would do, do. If it seems good to

you, O Concobar, and you of the Red Branch, let this child perish, so that the doom foretold by Cathba may be averted."

At that all were glad save Concobar. Two men was he, this king: a man who recked little save his desire, and a man who had wisdom. Out of his wisdom he knew that Felim and the Red Branch lords had right, for if it was ordained that the child of Elva should bring doom, that doom would surely come. Out of his longing he loved the beauty of which Cathba had spoken, and desired it against the years to come, and for the solace of his years when he had loved much and at the last was fain only of that which was the crown of life. So he spoke to those before him, and prevailed with them. Not vainly was he called Concobar of the Honeymouth.

"I will speak first to thee, Felim, son of Dall, my bard. It is not good to put death upon the fruit of one's loins. Thine own child should not see death through thee. But even were it so, it is not meet for me or for any one to bring the shame and pain of death to the house of a friend. Therefore, do not speak of putting silence and darkness upon the child of Elva."

Having spoken thus, the king turned to the lords of the Red Branch. As the wont was, at the royal festivals there were five

and three score over three hundred of the Red Branch there and then.4

"And to ye, Ultonians, I say this thing also. Do not bring blood into the hospitable home of Felim; that would be a stain upon him, upon yourselves, and upon me the king. But this is my counsel. Let the child live. There is no good in idle blood, and if ye stain yourselves with it, there shall be greater loss and sorrow to follow. Ye are all grown men, and not boys who do not know our laws. Ye know the Law of the Eric. Well, I will free ye of all doom, for upon my head be it. To myself I will take this fair child, and upon me, and not upon the Ultonians, nor upon the Red Branch, nor upon any other whomsoever save Concobar MacNessa, the high king, be the penalty, if penalty there be."

At that a son of a king arose.

"That is well, O Concobar. But what of Cathba's prophecy? We do not wish to see the sting that shall sting thee to madness, and if the child live shall we not see that sting?"

"Of that I have thought, that I have foreseen, Congal, son of Rossa of the Lakes. For I shall send the child into a lonely place, and there in a solitary rath shall she dwell and grow in years, and no man shall look upon her save I myself, and that only in the fulness of time. She shall be solitary and

apart as the Crane of Innisbea, that has dwelt upon its isle since the world was made, and is seen of none."

"Tell us once more, Concobar MacNessa; dost thou take this child and the doom of this child unto thee and to thee alone?"

"I have sworn. She shall grow in years, and be wife to me when the time is come. And if sorrow come with her, that sorrow shall be my sorrow. Not upon Uladh be it, but upon me. I have spoken."

"And as for thee, Felim?"

"It would be better to slay the child than to drown the land in blood."

"And as for thee, Cathba?"

"There is but one law: that which has to come is not seen but is already come." But while they were thus debating, the loud chanting voices of women were heard, and soon a messenger came, crying loudly that a child had been born to Elva, wife of Felim, and that it was a woman-child, and exceeding comely, and strong, and white as milk.

Once more Cathba the Druid spoke.

"She shall be called Deirdrê,[5] this woman whose warning beauty shall be a flame, and whose eyes shall be as bale-stars."

And so it was. The child was spared, and that night Elva slept in peace, and for many nights.

When the days of the feasting were over, Concobar left the dûn of Felim, and returned with all his company to Emania. With him he took the little child Deirdrê, and Elva came with him for a month and a day.

The month and the day soon passed, and then Elva went back to her own place. It was the will of the high king and of Felim, her husband; nevertheless, she sorrowed to part with her little child, who, even as a breast-babe, had eyes of so great a beauty that it was a joy to look into them.

Before the year was over — for, according to what Cathba the wise Druid said, the child must either be slain or hidden away before the first year of her life were past — Concobar sent Deirdrê with the nursing woman to whom he entrusted her, to a small *lios*, or fort, deep in the heart of the royal forest. A ban was upon that forest that none might hunt or even stray there without the king's will; and now that ban was made absolute, and it was known that death would be the portion of any man who went under these branches. None was to enter that woodland save Concobar, or whosoever might be of his chosen company, or whom the king might thither lead.

Concobar himself saw that food and milk was sent in plenty to the lios, and once in

every seven days he went thither himself. As year after year passed the secret of the hiding-place of Deirdrê went out of men's minds, and none knew of the lios save the king, and the sister of the nursing woman, who was his own foster-child and under *geas* or bond to him. This woman was named Lavarcam (*Leabharcham*), and was fair to see, and by Concobar held to be discreet and trustworthy beyond any other of his own people. She was of the royal household, and of the women trained as chroniclers and relaters.[6]

The little starry-eyed babe grew to a child, and from a child to a fawn of a girl, fair to see, and from a young girl to a maid, of a beauty so great that Concobar knew when she came to full womanhood she would be indeed as Cathba the Druid had prophesied.

Deirdrê saw no one but her nurse, and the tutor whom the king had sent to teach her all that could be taught, and not only in learning, but in courtesy and nobility; and Lavarcam, who alone went to and fro. From the time that Deirdrê passed out of her first girlhood the king saw little of her, but twice in each year — at the Festival of the Sun in the time of the greening, and at the Festival of Summerend at the fall of the leaf; and

this because of a warning that had been given him by Cathba the Arch-Druid.

How can the beauty of so fair and sweet a woman be revealed? Her loveliness was even as Cathba had foretold. It was a surpassing loveliness, and the three women who saw her often marvelled at it, and wondered no more that Deirdrê should be kept apart, for of a surety she would be a torch to put flame into the hearts of men, and to set great dûns and raths and warring nations ablaze. The poets have sung of her, and no man has sung but out of his deep desire. Her great sad eyes, so full of dream, were blue as are the hill-tarns at noon, and often dusky as they when passing clouds put purple into their depths; and like a golden web her hair was, sprayed out with shining light, wonderful, glorious; and her rowan-red lips were indeed that strange crimson fruit which Cathba had foreseen—rowan-red against the cream-white softness of her skin. Cream-white her body, and her neck like a tower of ivory; slim and graceful she was as a fawn, and fleet of foot as the wild roes on the hills, and when she moved in the sunlight or the shadow she was so beautiful that tears came at times to the eyes of the women in that lonely place. Yet even more wonderful was her voice—low and sweet, and with

music in it like the whisper of the wind among the reeds, or the ripple of green leaves, or the murmuring of a brook.

But now and from this time forth Concobar did not see her. For a year and a day after she attained womanhood, Cathba had warned the king it would mean death to him if he saw her. Nevertheless, he often heard of Deirdrê from Lavarcam, who in her going to and fro had ever one thing to say—that never had there been any woman so beautiful.

The rumour of this great loveliness spread from lip to lip. Yet no man ventured to seek out the hidden place where Deirdrê dwelled, for to all it was known that Concobar kept her there against the time when he would make her his queen, and all feared the long arm and the heavy hand of Concobar MacNessa. None might even question the king.

It was in this year that the shadows of the feet of Fate came into that place.

One day when Lavarcam told the king that Deirdrê grew fairer and fairer, so that even the wild creatures of the forest rejoiced in her, he all but yielded to his desire. Nevertheless, fearing the prophetic voice, he refrained, but cried: "When the snow time has passed, and the first greening is over,

and the wild rose runs like a flame throughout the land, then will I go to Deirdrê."

But before the greening was lost in the tides of summer, and before the wild rose had begun to run like a windy flame throughout the land, Concobar had learned that Destiny waits on no man.

One dawn the first snows came over the hills of the north and fell upon the forest. At the rising of the sun they ceased, but every branch was a white plume, and every glade was smooth and white as was the breast of Deirdrê herself. There was no wind in the deep blue sky, but the air was sharp and sweet because of the frost. For joy Deirdrê clapped her hands, as she stood upon the wall of the lios.

Then, glancing downward, she beheld the woman who was her attendant standing beside a calf that had been slain for the provisioning of those within the fort. The red blood streamed over the snow, and was as the crimson cloak of an Ultonian chief there, till the red grew mottled as it sank through the frozen whiteness.

Deirdrê's eyes ever saddened at the sight of blood, but after thought she knew that there was no harm in that shedding, and that no omen of further bloodspilling lay therein. While she was still gazing, a great

raven, glossy black and burnished in the sun rays, came gliding swift across the snow, and alit by the slain calf, and drank of the warm bright blood.

Of a sudden Deirdrê laughed. It was a sweet shy laugh, and Lavarcam, who had come to her side, asked her why there was such sweet low laughter upon her. Mayhap she knew; mayhap she guessed that Deirdrê dreamed dreams of love, because her womanhood was now come, and because of the old heroic tales she took so great a pleasure in, and because of the vision that every woman has in her heart.

"I was thinking, Lavarcam," she said.

"And what was that thought, Deirdrê?"

"It was this: that if there be anywhere a youth whose skin is white as that whiteness there, and whose locks are as dark and glossy as the plumage of that raven, and in whose cheek is a crimson as red as that blood that is upon the snow, then of a surety him could I love, and that gladly."

Lavarcam was silent; then the power of Destiny moved her.

"There is one man who is more beautiful than all others I have ever seen. He is young, and his hair is dark and glossy as that raven's wing, and in his cheek the ruddy flame is as that crimson blood, and his skin

is as white as any sunlit whiteness, or as thine own breast, Deirdrê."

"And what will be the name of that man, Lavarcam, and whence is he and where, and what is his degree?"

"He is called Naois, and is the son of Usna, who is a great lord in Alba. But he is now in Emania, among the company of the king; and with him are his brothers, both fair to see, and princes among men because of their beauty and valour, yet neither so surpassing all men as Naois. They are called Ailne and Ardan."[7]

That was a fatal saying of Lavarcam, for it sank into the mind of Deirdrê as moonlight into dark water.

Day by day thereafter she thought of nothing but of meeting this proud son of beauty; night by night she dreamed of Naois and of his love.

At the last, Lavarcam was filled with fear, for she saw that her words had awakened the flaming lion that lies hid in the heart. And truly it was not long till Deirdrê spoke to her of her longing and deep desire, and how that without Naois she did not care to live.

For a time Lavarcam smiled; but when she saw that the king's beautiful ward was ever passing more and more into an enchantment, her heart smote her.

One day, as she was returning from Emain Macha, she met a swineherd, clad roughly in the fell of a deer, and with him were two men, rude, dishevelled hillmen, bondagers to the Ultonians.

These, notwithstanding the law of Concobar, she took with her into the forest, and bade them await at a well that was there, until they heard the cry of a jay and the bark of a hill-fox, when they were to move slowly on their way, but to speak to no one whom they might meet, and above all to be silent after they left the shadow of the wood.

Having done this, she entered the lios, and asked Deirdrê to come forth with her into the woods.

When they drew near to the well, Lavarcam moved aside to look for some rare herb, as she said. Soon the cry of the jay and the bark of the hill-fox were in the air.

"That is a strange thing," Deirdrê said to her, when she was by her side again; "for that cry of the jay was the cry it gives in April, at the nesting time, and the bark of that hill-fox was the bark it gives in the season of the rut, many months agone."

"Hush," said Lavarcam, "and look."

They stood still, as they saw the swineherd and the two hillmen rise from near the well, and move slowly across the glade.

"Who are these, Lavarcam?" asked Deirdrê, with wonder in her eyes.

"These are men, daughter of Felim."

"They are younger than those I have seen from the outskirts of the forest, but they are wild in dress and mien, and are not of high degree, and my eyes have no pleasure in looking upon them."

"Nevertheless," answered Lavarcam, "these are the three sons of Usna — Naois and Ailne and Ardan."

For a brief while Deirdrê looked upon them. Then she spoke.

"The truth flew past thy lips, Lavarcam. Yonder man whom ye name Naois has neither raven hair nor white skin, nor the comely red in his face; and the two others are like the slaves I saw that day I beheld the foster-brothers of Concobar driving back from battle, in a chariot dragged by wild rough men in bondage. I remember the day, for it was then that thou bade me know that death was the portion of any man who sought me. That, too, I fear was no true word. Howsoever, as to these men, they may go. And yet —— wait."

And with that Deirdrê moved swiftly forward, and, coming upon the three men by a by-path through the fern, confronted them.

They stood amazed at her exceeding great

beauty. Nothing like it was in the whole world. Little wonder that these boors stood as though the face of death was bare to them; for beauty is strange and terrible to most men, and they are prone to stand in dread of it.

None spake. Deirdrê looked at each, a slow smile of mocking in her lips, a blue flame of scorn in her eyes.

"Are ye the sons of Usna?"

They made no answer, but stared unwaveringly upon her, as do the dull cattle in the fields.

"What brave courtesy!" she cried, mocking with her sweet voice, "how swift in courtesy! Tell me, Naois, son of Usna, is it the wont of thy people in Alba to stand by agape when a woman speaks? Who is Usna, or what? If he is a king, is he overlord of swineherds? If it is a place, is it the rough bogs of the hills where sword-clad men do not go, but only a poor folk clad rudely in skins?"

Still they answered nothing.

"Were ye whipt into silence when ye were young, ye that stand there wordless as dogs? If indeed ye be the sons of Usna, then truly Concobar MacNessa must be in sore want of men at Emain Macha!"

At that the swineherd could no longer hold to his bond.

"By thy great exceeding beauty I know that thou art no other than Deirdrê, whom the king hides in this place. But do not mock us, who would rather worship thee. We are no nobles, but a swineherd and two hillmen who are bondagers to Cairbre of the Three Dûns."

At that Deirdrê laughed gently.

"That I knew full well, swineherd, for all that I dwell here apart and see none of my kind, save Maev my nurse and Aeifa my tutor and Lavarcam the friend of the king. Those I have seen otherwise have been beheld a great way off, from where I laid hid in the woods. But now, wilt thou do one thing for me?"

"I will give thee my life."

Deirdrê smiled into the man's eyes, and what was only the swineherd died, and a strong heroic soul arose in him.

"I would see Naois, the eldest of the sons of Usna."

"That is against the law of Concobar: and long is the arm and heavy the hand of Concobar MacNessa the high king. But what is death to me, since thou willest me to do this thing for thee, Deirdrê of the beautiful eyes? Nay, I swear this thing: that rather would I die by torture, and please thee, than live out my life and refuse thee of what thou art fain.

For thy beauty is upon me like the light of the moon at the full on the dark moorland. I am thine."

Deirdrê looked at the man. Suddenly she stooped and kissed him on the wind-furrowed brow. Great fortune was his, and he was well repaid for his death by blunt spear-shafts, when Concobar knew all. For what is death, when a man has reached beyond the limit of his desire?

"Then go this night to Naois, and tell him that I, Deirdrê, dream of him by day and by night, and that if he is in anywise fain of me, let him come to me to-morrow, an hour before the setting of the sun, at this well."

With that she turned and walked slowly back to where Lavarcam awaited her. As they moved homeward through the wood, Lavarcam saw that the dream in the eyes of Deirdrê had deepened. It was in vain then, or later, that she sought to know what the fair, beautiful girl had said to the swineherd. She feared, however, that Deirdrê no longer trusted her because of the lie that she had told, and that mayhap the girl had plotted somewhat with the swineherd.

All the morrow Lavarcam watched Deirdrê closely, but she seemed as one under enchantment, and cared neither to chase the fawns, nor to fish, nor even to wander idly through

the woods. No speech would she have with any one, and said only that she wished to lie under the boughs of the great oak in front of the lios, and sleep.

"How can that be, when there is snow upon the ground?" Lavarcam asked.

"Is there snow upon the ground?" answered Deirdrê dreamily. "Then I will lie upon my deerskins, and Aeifa can play to me and sing me songs till dusk."

Hearing that, Lavarcam was glad, for now she could leave the lios with a mind at rest.

So, in the wane of the day, she passed through the forest and came out upon the great plain in front of Emain Macha, and went to seek the king to take counsel with him.

Nevertheless, Lavarcam was sore troubled for Deirdrê, and would have given her her heart's desire. Piteous indeed had her plaints been. With tears and reproaches and sweet beseechings nigh intolerable, Deirdrê had begged her to bring Naois to her, if for once only, so that she might at least see him, and know what her heart's desire was like. Moreover, was it not a bitter thing for her to be kept there in that lonely place, and neither to see nor converse with her own kind, and to be kept away from all the joys of youth, and to pass from spring

to summer, and from summer to autumn, and from autumn to winter, yea and from year to year, and be exiled there, to hear no young voices, no young laughter? When she pleaded thus, Lavarcam was sorrowful indeed, for she had the heart of a woman, and knew the beauty and the wonder and the mystery of love.

Thinking of these things, her heart smote her as she fared towards Emain Macha, and at the last she decided to say no word to the king as to what she feared Deirdrê may have told the swineherd. Furthermore, she muttered, what was death to her who had known all that life had to give her? At the worst, Concobar could put death upon her. Had she not lived and known love, and now was weary?

When she drew nigh to Emain Macha she saw three ravens and three hoodie-crows and three kites arise from some carrion hidden in the long grass that waved there.

When she came upon it, she saw that it was the body of the swineherd, loose with the gaping wounds of blunt spear-shafts. In thuswise she knew that Concobar had in some way heard of what the man had done.

Yet she had no fear from that. The swineherd was still now. Neither king nor raven, neither man nor hoodie-crow, neither

spear-shaft nor kite could now hurt him. It was better to be alive than to be dead, but it was well to be dead.

So Lavarcam turned and went over to the camp in Emain Macha where the sons of Usna were. There she saw Naois, and told him privily that Deirdrê longed to see him, and that the forest was open to the stealthy flight of the owl as well as to the soaring hawk.

Naois was indeed fair to see, and looking upon him Lavarcam knew in her heart that Deirdrê would love him, and he her. He listened, and she saw his eyes deepen, and a flush come and go upon his face. For sure there was a beating swift of his pulse in that hour.

Nevertheless, he could not come straightway, for Concobar knew that the swineherd had spoken to him of Deirdrê, and it was for this, and having seen and spoken with the girl, that the king had put the man to death — though for that, added Naois, little did the swineherd care, for he died laughing and mocking, and, when he lay still, there was a smile upon his face.

"And that was because Deirdrê had looked into his eyes, Naois, son of Usna."

"Truly, he died well. I know a prince among men who also would die gladly if Deirdrê would look into his eyes with love."

"Then come soon and hunt the deer in the solitudes to the north of the forest: and there, amid the woods, or in some glen, or on the hill-slopes, surely thou shalt meet with Deirdrê — and yet none know of it."

So Lavarcam and Naois made a bond between them, and parted.

Thereafter days passed. On the morrow of the seventh day Deirdrê was wandering among the glades and thickets of the uplands far away from the lios, rejoicing in her new freedom and hoping that one day her eyes might look upon Naois. She was dreaming her dream, when she started at a strange sound, the like of which she had never heard.

That far-off baying of hounds she knew, for oftentimes Concobar had ridden to the forest with his deerhounds: but that strange, wild, blazoning sound —— Was it the voice of the flying creature the hounds pursued?

Then the thought came to her that it was the hunting horn she had often heard of in the songs and war-ballads which Lavarcam and Aeifa were wont to sing to her.

But after that blast the horn no more tore the silence of the deep woods, and the hounds were still: for Naois had left the chase of the deer and was now moving listless through the green glooms of the forest. Night and day since Lavarcam and the swineherd had

told him of Deirdrê he had dreamed of the beautiful daughter of Felim the Harper. Remembering the last chant of Cathba the Druid, he recalled how Deirdrê had been named the Beauty of the World, and because he was himself a poet and a dreamer the vision had become part of his life, so that neither by night nor by day was there any hour wherein he did not see in his mind the tall, white-robed figure of Deirdrê, and the beauty of her eyes, and her face as the sweet wild face of a dream.

And so dreaming he stood at the edge of a glade, his swift eyes watching a fawn dispart a thicket that was close by. Yet it was no fawn as he thought: but rather was it as though a sudden flood of sunshine burst forth in that place. For a woman came from the thicket more beautiful than any dream he had ever dreamed. She was clad in a saffron robe over white that was like the shining of the sun on foam of the sea, and this was claspt with great bands of yellow gold, and over her shoulders was the golden rippling flood of her hair, the sprays of which lightened into delicate fire, and made a mist before him, in the which he could see her eyes like two blue pools wherein purple shadows dreamed.

So exceeding great was her beauty that

Naois did not think of her as Deirdrê or as any mortal woman, but rather as a daughter of the elder gods, or of that bright divine race of the Tuatha-De-Danann, whose beauty surpassed that of human beings as the beauty of the primrose bank that of the brown sod. He looked upon her amazed, and in a silent worship. If she were indeed of the Dedannan folk, she might go at any moment as a shadow goes, that now is here asleep upon the grass and in the twinkling of an eye is among the things of oblivion.

At last speech rose to his lips.

"O fair and wonderful one, whom I see well art of the old sacred race of the Tuatha-De-Danann, may I have word with thee? It may well be that thou art no other than the wife of Midir himself, she who lives in a fair shining grianan in the hollow of a hill, and lives upon the beauty and fragrance of flowers." Deirdrê looked at him, and her heart beat. He was in truth fair to see: fairer even than him whom she had imaged in her dreams, or him of whom Lavarcam had spoken.

"Speak. What wouldst thou?"

"I am faring idly through this lonely land, and I know not where I am. Yonder, in the valley behind the oak-glade, is a high-walled rath. Is it a place of the Shee,

and so forbidden? or who dwells there, and shall a spear or welcome greet me if I enter?"

"Indeed, thou mayst enter there, and a welcome awaits thee, O Naois, son of Usna."

"Thou knowest my name, O fair one; then, indeed, thou art of the old wondrous race, who know swifter than our thought, and whose sight is further and deeper than our sight."

"I am no queen, Naois, nor am I of the Tuatha-De-Danann, but am a woman as other women are. If I am beautiful in thine eyes, of that I am right glad, for thou art fairer to me than any man I have seen or dreamed of, and my pulse leaps when thine eyes look into mine. I am Deirdrê, the daughter of Felim the Harper; yet am I no better than a slave, for here am I bound to stay, and see no one save Lavarcam and my two women, and here I shall die for loneliness and longing."

Naois heard her sweet low voice with delight, and it was with joy at his heart he knew she was no strange Dedannan but a woman of his own race, and that she was Deirdrê. Love rose suddenly within him like a flame: a red flame was it that was in his heart, and a white flame in his mind, and out of these two flames is wrought the love of

love and the passion of passion and the dream of dreams.

"Art thou, indeed, Deirdrê?" he whispered; "art thou that Deirdrê of whom I have dreamed? Strange is the strangeness of this meeting, O white daughter of Felim. For so great is thy beauty that I was fain to believe I saw before me one of the queens of the Tuatha-De-Danann. But is this thing true, that against thine own will Concobar the high king keeps thee here like a trapped bird among these woods?"

"True it is, and more: for it is not even by Concobar's will that I roam the woodlands. He was fain that I should never leave the rath save with Lavarcam, and that I should spend most of my days within the stone walls of the dreary lios where he has doomed me to dwell."

"Deirdrê, my heart is filled with a rising tide. That tide is love. Thou hast not seen the sea: but there, when the tide flows, there is nothing, there is no one, in all the world, which can say it nay. So is my love for thee, that now rises; and, once thine, will be thine evermore. Yet I would not put this upon thee; and if thy words and looks come out of thy frank, sweet courtesy and open maidenly heart, and mean no more than that thou carest for me as a brother,

it is thy brother I will be, Deirdrê, to serve thee and succour thee and love thee evermore, and in that way only."

For a brief while she looked at him. Then the noon-blue of her eyes deepened, and a flush drifted through her face and waned into the deeper red of her parted lips.

"Naois," she said in a low voice, which trembled as a reed in the wind, "I, too, love. It is thee I love. If it be wrong for me, a maiden, to speak thus, forgive me, for I have grown wilding here, and am more akin to the fawns of the forest than to womenkind of mine own age or estate. But I love thee, Naois: as of old, in the far-off Dedannan days, Dectera the queen loved the Green Harper, and went forth with him and was seen no more of her own people."

"If thou indeed wilt have it so, Deirdrê, be thou my Dectera, and let me be thy Green Harper. For beyond the reach of life or death is the greatness of the love I feel for thee, even now in this first hour of our meeting."

"Thy words are in my heart, Naois; and because that this is so, I now put *geas* upon thee. Let thy sword be as my sword, and be thou to me as brother and friend and the holder of my leal love; and to this end, lo! I throw this yellow thistle against thy cheek, to

raise a mark of shame there if thou dost not fulfil the bond, and there to be seen of all men as a sign and witness of thy disgrace; yea, even thus I put *geas* upon thee, to succour me in my ill fate, to take me unto thyself, to give thyself unto me, and to let us go forth together heedless of Fate."

Naois looked at her with proud eyes.

"Of a surety, Deirdrê, there is no hero of the Red Branch who hath a courage greater than thine, even though it may be that thou speakest the more freely from knowing little of what may befall."

"What can befall save death, and dost thou fear death, son of Usna?"

Naois smiled out of grave eyes.

"If I feared death, Deirdrê, I would not now be speaking with thee here. It is swift silence upon any who in this forbidden land speaks with the daughter of Felim the Harper. Concobar MacNessa has the ears of a hare and the eyes of a hawk and the swoop of an eagle. Dost thou remember the swineherd to whom thou gavest word privily? Well, that night he lay in the grass tended only by the raven and the wolf, for he was done to death with blunt spear-shafts."

"For that I have deep grief," said Deirdrê, with tears drifting like a rainy mist athwart the blue of her eyes.

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"Nevertheless, he died with a smile, Deirdrê. Thou hadst looked into his eyes and kissed him. Even so, and for less now, would I too die."

"That thou shalt not do, Naois;" and even as she spoke Deirdrê moved forward and put her honeysweet lips against the mouth of Naois, and made his blood leap, and a flame come into his eyes, and a trembling come into his limbs.

Then, as though with that kiss she had become as a wild rose, she stood swaying lightly, her fair face delicately aflame. Naois put his arms about her, and kissed her on the brow and on the lips.

"That kiss on the brow is for service," he said, "because from this hour thou art my queen; and that kiss on the lips is for love, for from this hour I shall love no woman save thee thyself, but shall be thine and thine only in life or death."

Nevertheless, though Naois accepted the *geas* put upon him by Deirdrê, he was troubled at the thought of the anger of Concobar the high king. It would be a swift and bitter death for him, and for Deirdrê too it might be death or worse.

The thought in his mind swam into his eyes, and Deirdrê saw it. She shrank from him, and stood hesitating and as though about

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to flee at his first word of doubt. When he looked at her again his last fear went.

"Fair wonderful one, thou art as a fawn there in the fern where thou standest; Deirdrê, do not doubt the truth of my words. I am thine to love and to serve, and am under *geas* to thee. But my thought was this: if we two go hence and are waylaid, it will be death, and if we go hence and are not waylaid forthwith, it will still be death; for long is the arm, and heavy the hand, and tireless the quest of Concobar MacNessa. And this, too: that if we cross the Moyle and go to Alba, it may still be death; yea, though for a year or for a brood of years we elude the undying wrath and vengeance of the king."

"He will forget when once the bird is flown. Neither the bird nor the wind leaves any track, so let our flight be as that of the bird and our way be as that of the wind."

"The king forgetteth not. If so be that we might escape him many years, he will yet have his will of us in the end; and this though thou wert old, Deirdrê, and wert no longer his desire, and though I were outlawed and broken and no more in his sight than a wolf of the hills, good to slay if come upon, but not worthy of chase."

"Concobar is not a king in Alba?"

"No."

"Then let us go to thine own land. He can do no more than send emissaries after us, and with these thou canst deal swiftly, Naois."

At that, Naois lightly laughed.

"Truly, I am seeing Concobar as a man sees his own shadow in the water. He is a great king in Uladh, but he is no more in Alba than any hero of the Red Branch. Come, Deirdrê; across the Moyle are the pine-green shores of Alba. It is a fair, beautiful land. The sea-lochs reach far among pine-clad hills, and green pastures are on the slopes of the great mountains and around the shadowy, inland waters. The forests are full of deer and wild birds, the rivers and lochs of fish, the pastures of cattle and sheep and swift brown mares. Thou shalt have milk to drink, and the red flesh of the salmon, and the brown flesh of the deer, and the white flesh of the badger. Thou shalt lack for nothing, who art my queen; and thou shalt have love till the sun grows a lordlier fire and the stars leap in their slow dance from dusk to dawn."

"I will come," Deirdrê whispered, with glad eyes.

"Only thou must not delay. Thy coming must be now. Thou must not even enter the rath again. Otherwise it is never the waters of the Moyle that we shall see, but only the red flame in the eyes of Concobar."

Even while Naois spoke his eyes grew hard, and his hands slipped to the javelin he had by his side. While Deirdrê watched him in amaze, he swung the iron-pointed shaft at a place where a bent bracken hung listless in the air.

"Is it a wolf?" cried Deirdrê, in sudden affright.

"It is worse than a wolf," answered Naois; "for if thou wilt go to that place thou wilt see either a slain man, or the form of a man, in the grass beneath the bracken."

Swiftly Deirdrê ran to the spot wherein the javelin had swung singing. There was no one there, but, where the javelin still quivered slightly, she saw the shape of a crouching man, and discerned, by the bending of the bracken, what course he must have twisted away.

Naois followed and stood beside her. As he stooped to pluck the javelin from the ground, he descried a wooden-hilted knife.

"It is as I thought," he said gravely. "Concobar has set a spy upon me. No Ultonian carries a knife such as this. It belongs to the hillmen of the north-west, of whom a few years agone we made slaves. Mayhap one of these men who were with the swineherd has been told to follow me secretly wheresoever I go."

Deirdrê turned and looked at Naois with eyes filled with a new fear, because of her love of him.

He took her hand in his.

"There is yet time, Deirdrê. Wilt thou go back to the rath, and stay there till Concobar wills thee to be his wife?"

"I cannot go back."

"Then come, O Deirdrê."

And with that they turned and moved swiftly northward through the forest, by the way Naois had already passed.

"By dawn we may reach the Dûn where my two brothers now are, and for that day and that night we may rest in safety," whispered Naois, as Deirdrê turned and looked for the last time upon the place where she had lived all these years.

"But thereafter, O love that I have won, the wind must be in our hair and the dead leaves be upon the soles of our feet, for there can be no resting for us till we are away from this land: no, and not for us only, but also for Ailne and Ardan. Concobar will not rest content with bitter wrath, and, if he cannot track the stag, will slay the fawns."

Soon thereafter they drew near the place where Naois had left his hounds and his huntsmen. Bidding Deirdrê hide among the bracken and undergrowth, he went forward

alone and told the men to go back to the Dûn of the sons of Usna, but not till the third day, and by circuitous ways. Thus he hoped that he might the longer elude Concobar, whose emissaries would follow the track of his hounds.

Thereafter Naois and Deirdrê fared swiftly hand in hand through the sombre ways of the forest. While it was still light they emerged upon a great moor, which they crossed, and then ascended the gorges of the hills. There the night fell, as though a wind-drifted darkness suddenly suspended and then swiftly enshrouded everything. They dreaded to rest, and yet so deep was the darkness that they could fare no farther.

But while they were still whispering the one to the other, Deirdrê descried a soft, silver shining, like a dewy gossamer. It was the little group of seven stars that we call the Pleiades.

"See," she whispered, "An Grioglachan! When they shine, others will soon be seen." And so it was.

All through the night the fugitives hastened onward by the light of the stars, ever keeping close to each other, for the mountain solitudes were full of dreadful noises, and in the black tarns among the peaty moss they could hear the moaning of the kelpie, or on

the shores of the hill-lochs the shrill neighing of the water-horses, terrible creatures of the darkness.

For the last hour of the dark they rested a brief while, lying close hid among the bracken, in a sheltered place on a rocky mountain slope. Deirdrê heeded little now the weariness and fears of that perilous faring by night, for she was with Naois; and Naois now was glad, and no longer cared whether death was sure or not. He fell asleep there under the morning stars, among the winter-brown bracken, with Deirdrê's head upon his breast; and his last thought was, that if the swineherd had died smiling because Deirdrê's eyes had looked into his, how well might he too die content if his hour came suddenly upon him.

The dawn wavered among the hills, but still they slept.

A wolf tracking a wounded doe howled, and the howling wailed from corrie to corrie. Deirdrê stirred, but slept again. An eagle screamed as it rose and wheeled against the broadening light, but its wild voice was drowned in silence. Then came the first sun-rays rippling, dancing, leaping, from amid the crested heights and peaks to the eastward, and Naois awoke.

For some moments he lay breathless with

wonder. Deirdrê, in all her radiant beauty, was by his side, her golden hair ablaze in the sunlight, and her fair face like a flower amid the bracken. It was too great a wonder. Then he knew that Concobar's hounds might any hour now be upon them, and so he put his dream away from him, and stooped and kissed Deirdrê upon the lips. With a cry she woke, and put her arms about him. Hard it was for him to add to her weariness; but she rose at once, and seemed, indeed, in his eyes, as fresh as any fawn of the hill-side. She went to a little tarn close by and drank of the cool, sweet water.

As she drank Naois looked at her, and again wondered if she were not one of the divine race of old, the mysterious Tuatha-De-Danann, whom, ages before, the Milesians had driven to the hills and remote places. So fair was she that his heart ached. Then a swift pulse of joy leaped within him, and he was glad with a great gladness.

Thereafter they sped swiftly onward, and now Naois exulted, for he recognised the peaks and the trend of the valleys. Within an hour from the rising of the sun he saw the grey walls of the Ultonian Dûn of the sons of Usna.

His long cry — that of the heron thrice repeated — brought Ailne and Ardan forth.

Deirdrê looked at them wondering, for they, too, were taller and nobler than other men, and only less beautiful in her eyes than Naois himself.

But if she wondered, much more did they marvel at what they saw. Never had they beheld any woman so beautiful, and their first thought was that of Naois, that Deirdrê was of the fair divine race who were now so seldom seen of men.

But when Naois had told them all, and that she who was now his bride was no other than that Deirdrê whom Concobar the high king had set aside to become his queen, they were filled with sorrow. Well they knew that Concobar MacNessa would not lightly relinquish the fair maid whom he had so long secreted in the forest-lios, and that blood would flow because of this thing.

"Moreover," said Ailne, "hast thou forgotten the prophecy? There is the saying of Cathba the Druid, of which we have all heard: that from the daughter of Felim the Harper would come sorrow to the king, and severance of the Red Branch from the lost kingdom of Uladh, and rivers of blood."

"That may be, Ailne, my brother," Naois answered; "but I ask none to go with me into this doom, if that doom indeed must be, though mayhap the dark hour of it is passed.

For Deirdrê and I shall now fare forward, with some of our following, and with horses and food, and haply we may reach the coast and find our great galley in the Creek of the Willows, where we secreted it, and so gain the shores of Alba before Concobar can overtake us."

But while Ailne pondered, Ardan spoke.

"That shall not be, Naois. Listen! By the Sun and the Wind I swear that where thou goest I will go, and that I will never desert thee nor Deirdrê, who is now our sister. If the doom must come, let it come. What is death, that it should put a paleness into the face of love? Are we not close-kin, children of one mother, and is not Deirdrê thy wife now and our sister, and are we not henceforth as one? Speak, Ailne, is it not so?"

"It is so. Ardan has spoken for me. But I say nothing, for I feel upon us the shadow of that doom of which, as we have heard, Cathba the Druid spoke."

But here Deirdrê moved forward.

"Listen, Naois, and ye, Ailne and Ardan, my brothers: it is not for me to bring sorrow upon the king and upon the Red Branch and upon Uladh, and still less upon ye, my brothers, and upon thee, Naois. Therefore, let me now go back to the lios, and tell Lavarcam,

who will tell the king, that I have no will to stray, and that I will abide in that place till I die, or till Concobar dare put his face against Fate and take me thence."

At that Naois smiled only. There was no word to say; in his eyes was all his answer to Deirdrê.

But Ardan answered for himself and Ailne:

"Though the stars fall, beautiful daughter of Felim, who art now Deirdrê, our sister, we shall not leave thee, nor suffer thee to go from us save by thine own free will, and that in no fear for what may befall us. Naois and Ailne and Ardan are the three sons of Usna, upon whom long ago *geas* was set, that each would abide by each until death."

Thereupon all kissed each other, and took the deep vow of fealty. The sons of Usna knew well that it would be a madness to withstand Concobar in their Dûn, strong as it was; for in time he would take the place, as dogs hunt out the badger from its lair, and at the best would still starve them into surrender or death.

So with all speed they summoned those of their following who were under the sword-bond, and put together food and raiment, and then mounted and rode swiftly away.

As they passed the highest ridge to the eastward that night they looked back. A

red light flared in a valley far to the west. It was their Dûn, a torch amid the darkness. A single column of flame rose above it, and wavered to and fro. And by that sign they knew that the long arm and the heavy hand of Concobar MacNessa had already reached out towards them. Three times fifty men went with them, and so swift was their flight and so sure their way that before long they came to the coast-lands. There, in the Creek of the Willows, the long black galley was found; and swiftly all embarked.

It was with glad eyes that Deirdrê and the sons of Usna saw the dancing waves of the sea, and felt its free breath break upon them. From three great tiers, fifty score men to each, the vassals thrust out their long oars, and with their blades threshed the waters into a yeast of foam. In the dazzle of the sea Deirdrê rejoiced, and made the hearts of all there to swell because of an exceeding sweet song she sang.

Naois and Ailne and Ardan sat beside her, and could scarce take from her face their dreaming eyes.

Towards noon the wind shifted, and slid out of the north towards the west. Then the great sail was hoisted, and bellied out to the steady breeze, and the oars were shipped. The black galley now flew along the waters

like a cormorant. Deirdrê laughed with joy at this new beautiful world of the sea, and never tired of trailing her hands in the swift lapsing wave, or in the send of the following billow.

In the afternoon they came close to the shores of Alba, and made northward, past many isles and through narrow straits and fjords. In one and all Deirdrê took pleasure, and was glad indeed that the land of Naois was so beautiful.

At sundown they reached the eastern shores of the great island of Mull, and there the wind failed them, so the galley was put into a bay that is now the bay of Aros.

There the sons of Usna debated long as to what course to follow. Naois and Ailne thought it best to move inland, and to gain the protection of the high king of Alba; but Deirdrê feared this because of a dream she had thrice dreamed, wherein she saw a strange king and a strange folk laughing over the slain body of Naois, while she stood by crowned but a captive. As for Ardan, he said only that the sons of Usna should go to where their father's Dûn had been, before the last king of Alba had destroyed it.

That night a galley came to them from the long island of Lismore. In it were a score of men, commanded by a lord of Appin,

named Fergus of the Three Dûns. With him was a stranger, clad in a rich robe of fur, so clasp across the throat with gold that the hood he wore fell about and covered his face. While Fergus spake with the sons of Usna, and told them how they had been seen by men of his in a swift war-galley, off the south coast of Mull, and urged them also to go inland to meet the king, the stranger looked steadfastly upon Deirdrê.

When at last he had to speak to the brothers he addressed them courteously, but in a Gaelic strange to their ears. He bade them come with him to his high-walled Dûn, a brief way inland: to come alone, as his guests, and to bring Deirdrê with them.

"It is not well to go to a man's Dûn, and not be knowing that man's name," said Naois courteously.

The stranger hesitated, and looked at Fergus.

"They call me Angus Mudartach," he said. But at that Deirdrê asked him to let her look upon his face.

"For it is not meet," she added, "that we should go to a man's Dûn and not have seen his face."

Angus of Moidart drew back his hood.

Deirdrê's lips grew pale. Then she smiled.

"Let us rest here for to-night, Angus

Mudartach," she said, "and, if thou wilt come again on the morrow after to-morrow, thou canst take us with thee to thy great Dûn. But meanwhile we have travelled far and swiftly, and would rest: and, as thou seest, the skies are clear, and we want for nothing."

Once more Angus pleaded to the sons of Usna.

"Ye are brave men, and can laugh at weariness or danger. But if the island be swept by a great storm to-night, or if the followers of Concobar, king of the northlands of Erin, come upon ye, or if other misadventure befall, shall ye wantonly expose this fair young princess? Nay, rather, let her come with me, and she shall not only be safe in my great rath of Dunchraig, but there my wife and her maidens shall make much of her, and give her white robes and golden torques and garments of delicate furs. This maid whom ye call Deirdrê is too young to be thrown thus idly before the feet of the evil powers who are for ever clamouring for death."

But, at a sign from Deirdrê, Naois refused; saying, with gracious words and courteous mien, that it would rejoice them all to visit Angus Mudartach later, but not then.

So Angus of Moidart turned, frowning, and went back to his galley with Fergus of

the Three Dûns. And as he went he asked mutteringly how many men the sons of Usna had with them. When he learned that there were thrice fifty, and that Fergus had but a score and ten men with him, he said no more.

When the strangers had gone, Naois turned to Deirdrê and asked why she had not shown more graciousness to one who was surely a great lord among the Alban Gaels, and why she would not go with him.

"Because, Naois, that man who called himself Angus Mudartach is no other than the King of Alba. He it is whom I saw in my dreams, laughing over your slain body, and beside whom I stood crowned and yet a captive. And by that token I warn ye of this thing: that the Alban king desireth me, and would fain slay ye all, or deliver ye into the hands of Concobar MacNessa."

Naois stood brooding, but Ardan stepped forward.

"Deirdrê is right. And wise she was, too, to bid this Angus of Moidart come on the morrow after to-morrow. Nevertheless, I know well by hearsay of his vassal, Fergus of the Three Dûns, and that the man is called Fergus the Wily. He will not wait, but at dawn will be about us, with thrice fifty and thrice fifty again."

"Ardan has spoken well," added Naois.

"There is but one thing to be done. Weary we are, but we must go hence at once."

And so it was. The dusk was heavy upon sea and land that night, and a sea-mist came up and obscured the skies, so that not a star was visible.

Soundlessly they launched the great galley again, and once more set sail. The night-wind was from the south-east, whereat they rejoiced, for thus there was no need of the oars, and so no betraying thresh would be heard.

When they were well north of Lismore they put out the long oars and swung the galley northwards. It was with relief that the sons of Usna passed the Appin lands, and before dawn rowed into a great sea-loch.

There, however, they learned that the King of Alba, he who had called himself Angus Mudartach, was in the westlands only for a brief while, and would have to haste to Dunedin straightway, as runners had come with tidings of a great rising. He had no rath of Dunchraig, and no Dûn there; and so in truth the sons of Usna knew that the king had lied to them, and that Deirdrê was right. As for Fergus of the Three Dûns, he was no longer a great lord, but had been despoiled, and at the most could summon two score and ten men.

So the sons of Usna greatly rejoiced, for now they could go to their own land in safety, which lay beyond the region held by Fergus of the Dûns.

For seven days they stayed by the shores of that sea-loch, under the shadow of mighty mountains. Ardan, with a scanty following, went through the hill-passes, and returned saying that the King of Alba had gone to his own country and that all the great lords of the region had departed with him, including Fergus.

So on the eighth day the galley sailed a short way southward once more, and entered into the Bay of Selma. There, on a rocky eminence, were the walls of their great Dûn, which Usna their father had built among the ruins of the chief stronghold of the Cruithne, the ancient people of Alba.[8]

It was with joy that the sons of Usna saw once more the house of their childhood, and with still greater joy that they found the people of the neighbouring glens and straths still loyal to them. Their father Usna had ever been at war with the King of Alba, and after many battles (the bards sang of the beauty of Usna's wife as the torch that lit those wars) he had conquered all this region. But at his death, by treachery the king had overcome the stronghold and destroyed it.

But now again the sons of Usna had their home in their own eyrie. They knew not how long they might abide there in peace, for either the King of Alba, or Fergus of the Dûns as his leader of men, would come again when once peace in the eastlands was secured.

There Naois wished to dwell alone with Deirdrê and a few followers, but Ailne and Ardan once more refused to leave him then or ever. But glad were the thrice fifty vassals to return to their own land, and without regret the sons of Usna saw them set sail for Erin. They were men who cared little for aught save strife, and when not wielding sword or spear were haughty and bitter with all other men save those of the Red Branch, and so were only a danger and a weariness in that place.

Throughout that winter they lived there in peace, hunting and fishing. So great was the love of each for Deirdrê that every day was full of peace and content wherein they saw her. Naois moved in a dream, and knew the extreme of joy. At night, before the fire, Deirdrê sang to them old-world airs of a sweet plaintive music, so sweet and plaintive that men said she must be no other than Fionnula, she of the children of Lir who were turned into wild swans, and lived a thousand years in the old, old days.

But when spring came again — a spring so fair and sweet that it was as though May had come hand in hand with February — a rumour reached them that the King of Alba, though he could not penetrate the highlands of the west, intended, with the help of Fergus of the Dûns and other chieftains, to proceed once more against the Dûn of Usna. Moreover, he had sworn to raze it to the ground, and to slay Naois, and to take Deirdrê to be his wife.

Naois laughed at this, for he knew well that the King of Alba would never take him alive, nor yet Deirdrë. But after long colloquy with Ailne and Ardan, all decided to set forth and pass northward to the land whence their mother had come, a land of endless mountains and narrow lochs, beautiful beyond any other, grander than any Deirdrê had seen, and remote beyond the reach of any Alban king.

So thither they set forth, and took with them in their great galley two score and ten men of their own clan. After long sailing up narrow lochs, the sons of Usna reached the mountain land whence their mother had come. Her father was dead, but the great Dûn he had built upon the summit of one of the hills overlooking the Black Loch had been left unharmed, and was tenanted only

by wandering shepherds. Here Naois and Deirdrê made their home, and in that beautiful land and in the glory of spring, knew the full joy and richness of life.

For a brief while all the people of the mountain lands round about gave in their adherence to Naois, so that he became as a king in that region. So great was the fear in which the three sons of Usna were held, and so strong were they in their mountain home, that none dared to approach them with the flaming brand.

Thus three years passed, and in all the wide reaches of the world there was no man so happy as Naois and no woman so happy as Deirdrê; and after these there were none so happy as Ailne and Ardan, who were well content to live so that they might be near the beautiful wife of Naois, their sister, Deirdrê, fairest of all women in the world.

The King of Alba, whom they had feared, was now dead, and the king who reigned in his place was well disposed towards the sons of Usna and sought their alliance. So this was done, and the name and fame of the three brothers spread throughout the land; while from the wild west to the populous east the poets sang of the beauty of Deirdrê.

In the summer months they abode at the

high fort of Deirdrê, for so they named it, on the heights above the Black Loch, or Loch Ness as we now call it; and from the first frosts till the cuckoo's song had ceased they lived at Dunuisneachan, their father's ancient stronghold by the shores of Loch Etive. Thence often they wandered far afoot, or sailed southward and eastward among the sea-lochs and narrow kyles. They hunted in Glenorchy and fished under the mountain-shadows on Loch Awe; or followed the deer through the woods of Glenlaidhe. When it was pleasant to be upon the waters, they sailed down the long fjord of Loch Fyne, and rested awhile at the Haven of the Foray, and watched the coming and going of the rainbows on the rocky headlands which guard that place; then they would cross to the Cowal, and enter the narrow Kyles of Bute, where on the little isle we call the Burnt Island they built a vitrified fort. Thence they followed past the Hills of Ruel to Glendaruay (Glendaruel), and so to the head of Loch Striven and up Glenmassan, and thence down by the sweet inland waters of Loch Eck, and waterward again by the bay we now call the Holy Loch. Thence up the long, narrow fjord of Loch Long, the Loch of Ships, they sailed, till among the mountains they crossed the short pass to Loch

Lomond, and perhaps met the soldiery of the King of Alba at the inland lakes, or came upon the great fort of Dunbarton on the Clyde; or they may have crossed the hill to the Gareloch, and so returned westward once more by the blue frith of Clyde, past the precipitous isle of Arran, and so up Loch Fyne again; or seaward by the Mull of Cantire, and thence northward past the isles to their own place, and could once more watch the salmon leaping through the Falls of Lora or chase the deer on the hills of Etive.

But during all this time Concobar, the high king of the Ultonians, nursed his bitter thoughts. He had heard of the great fame and happiness of the sons of Usna, and more than ever he yearned after Deirdrê, his wrath at his loss being the greater because that all the old prophecies about the beautiful daughter of Felim were unfulfilled.

One day the high king made a great festival in Emain Macha, and never in Erin was seen one more royal and magnificent. The princes and nobles from all the regions in the sway of Concobar were there, and all the musicians, singers, and poets in Uladh.

In the midst of the festival Concobar asked those present at his board if now, in the height of the glory of the Red

Branch, they wanted for anything; but they answered as with one voice that they were content.

"And that is what I am not," he answered.

"And wherefore, O king and lord?"

"Because that the three greatest of ye are absent from us. I speak of the three Torches of the Valour of the Gael: Naois and Ailne and Ardan, the sons of Usna, the son of Congal Claringnech. For now I the king say this: that it is not fitting these three heroes, the pride of our chivalry, should be in exile, and this only because of a woman. By the Sun and Wind, there is no woman alive who is worthy to be the cause of this. Far better were it that the sons of Usna were once more in our midst. Even now they hold half the lands of Alba under the shadow of their sword. Truly they are heroes, and if dark days come upon us, as the soothsayers foretell, then indeed we shall be in sore need of them."

All there were rejoiced at that. There was not one who had not lamented the fierce anger of Concobar, and who was not fain to have the sons of Usna again among the chivalry of the Red Branch. Only fear had not allowed them to speak, for the high king had slain a man who had said that Naois was too great a lord to be exiled.

"And since ye are so glad at this thing," Concobar added, "and would have these heroes among us, to be the chief pride, glory and defence of Uladh against all other kingdoms and provinces of Erin, I say to ye: Go and bring hence again from Alba the three sons of Usna."

"That is well," their spokesman answered; "but who is to prevail with Naois and his brothers? We are willing to go, but we cannot bring Naois against his will. Moreover, is he not under *geas* not to put foot again in Erin?"

"Not so. I know that Naois is under *geas* not to return to Erin unless it be in the company of Fergus, the son of Rossa the Red, or Conall Cernach, or Cuchulain. And look you, each of these is now here, so that I shall well know who most loves me."

So, when the feast was over, Concobar first drew Conall Cernach aside.

"Tell me, O warrior lord," he said, "what wouldst thou say or do if I should send thee for the sons of Usna, and that at my secret command they should be slain privily — a thing, nevertheless, Conall, which I do not purpose to do?"

"That could not be done, O king and lord, without a bitter and wrongful bloodshedding, for I could not do otherwise than put death

upon each and all of the Ultonians who might be with me on that day."

"That may be so, Conall Cernach. So now, go."

Thereafter the king sent for Cuchulain. The young champion came to him fearlessly, for the whole heart of the warrior prince was noble and courageous.

Concobar asked him the same question as he had asked Conall Cernach.

"What would I do, O lord and king?" answered Cuchulain with proud disdain. "This thing I would do, and my troth to it: that if thou through me brought about the death of the sons of Usna, thou mightst flee eastward to Innia Iarrtharaigh[10] itself, and yet not be safe from perishing by my hand because of thy deed."

Concobar smiled grimly.

"I knew well, Cuchulain, that ye bore me no love," he said; and bade the hero begone.

Thereafter the king sent for Fergus, the son of Rossa, and to him he put the same question as to Conall Cernach and to Cuchulain.

"This much I say," said Fergus, "that never would I raise hand or weapon against thee: nevertheless, there is not one Ultonian who might fare forth on that errand who would not get the shortness of life and sorrow of death from me."

"It is thou, Fergus, son of Rossa, who dost truly love thy king. It is to thee I entrust this thing, who shalt be greater in Erin than any son of Usna. Go forth on the morrow, and remember thy name of old — Fergus Honeymouth. Of a surety Naois, with Deirdrê, and Ailne and Ardan, shall come from Alba with thee. When thou art again in Erin, go at once to the house of Borrach, the son of Cainte; and when thou art there stay, because of one of thy *geasa* never to refuse a feast, and beforehand I shall warn Borrach of this thing. Then send forward at once, and without covenant, and without protection, to Emain Macha, the three sons of Usna."

So on the morrow Fergus went forth, taking none with him save his two sons, Illann the Fair, and Buine of the Red Locks, and a man Cullen to steer the sea-barge wherewith he would set sail.

It was a fair voyage, and soon the black barge of Fergus sailed past the isles and headlands of Alba, and came to Loch Etive and the Bay of Selma, where the great fort of Dûn Usneachain lay black against the ivy-clad heights beyond.

This was in the first heats of summer, and Naois and Deirdrê, with Ailne and Ardan, had left the fort and were among the rocky

declivities of the woodland near the sea. There they had three hunting booths: one for Naois and Deirdrê, one for Ailne and Ardan, and one wherein to have their eating and drinking. In front of one of these booths Naois and Deirdrê sat, on that day of the days, playing on the *Cemrcaem* (the chess-board), the very chess-board which had belonged to Concobar, but which the king had left in the Dûn of Ailne and Ardan when hunting near by, on the day before that on which they fled with Naois. It was all of ivory, and the chessmen were of wrought gold and in the likeness of strange kings and priests and fantastic animals wrought in immemorial years in the Orient.

And while they were playing a great shout was heard, coming upon them from a branch-hid hollow of the sea.

"That is the voice of a man of Erin," said Naois, holding in the air a golden knight.

"Not so," answered Deirdrê; "it is the voice of a Gael of Alba." Yet well she knew that Naois had guessed aright, and that even now were the footsteps of fate drawing close. For none can prevail against destiny.

Once more a loud cry was heard, and a voice called upon Naois and the sons of Usna.

"Of a surety, that is a voice of a man of

Erin," said Naois eagerly, for his heart was fain to see an Ultonian again, and to hear of the Red Branch and of the fate of Uladh, and as to whether Concobar reigned still.

"Indeed, it is not so," answered Deirdrê, and turning the great glory and beauty of her eyes upon Naois she bade him play on. Then a third cry, nearer and clearer, was heard; and now all knew that it was the voice of a man of Erin.

"And if there be no cloud upon me," said Naois, "that is the voice of no other than Fergus, the son of Rossa the Red, whom I knew well of old, and for whom my heart is fain. Ardan, do ye go down at once to the haven, and bid Fergus welcome, and all who may be with him. It is a good day this for us, when once more we may hear the voices of the Red Branch."

While Ardan went to the haven, Deirdrê told Naois she had known from the first that the newcomer was a man out of Erin, and moreover, that he came from Concobar, and that his coming boded no good.

"And how will you be knowing the one and the other, Deirdrê?"

"From a dream that I had: to wit, that three birds flew hither from Emain Macha, and brought with them three sips of rare honey, and then that they left us with that

honey but took away instead three sips of our blood."

"Tell me, my queen, what is the reading you put upon that dream?"

"That Fergus comes to us with the honey-words of peace, but that behind them lies the shedding of blood, and that blood ours."

Meanwhile Ardan welcomed Fergus, and brought him and his companions to where Naois sat playing with Deirdrê upon the ivory and gold chess-board of Concobar the king. As the fair-smiling Ultonian drew near, he smiled a grimmer smile behind his beard, to see Naois there with the two chiefest treasures of the king's heart — the woman he wished to make his queen, and the chess-board that had come to him from some great king's palace in the dim remote Indies of which the poets sang.

Great was the rejoicing, and Naois and his brothers and Deirdrê embraced Fergus and his sons, and eagerly questioned them for tidings.

"The best tidings I have," Fergus answered, "is that I have come to ye with messages of loving peace from Concobar, whose heart is smitten by your long absence, and who would fain see in Erin again the three noblest lords in his or any other realm. Moreover, he has sent me to you with covenants and

guarantees of loving good faith. He has pledged his kingly word, and I, too, have pledged mine, and ye know well, ye sons of Usna, that Fergus MacRossa Rua is not a man of light word. So come back to Erin with me, Naois and Ailne and Ardan, and I pray of thee, come thou too, Deirdrê, wife of Naois. Great shall be the welcome given to ye all, and sure it is a good thing to end a feud, and to put an unwaking sleep upon the sword and the spear."

"That is a good word," said Naois, who was well pleased; but a sob was in the heart of Deirdrê, and her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Surely," she said, "Concobar MacNessa forgets. The sons of Usna are no tributaries. Naois is overlord now of a country greater in extent than all the province of Uladh over which Concobar is king. It ill befits a king of an isle to go as a forgiven guest to the lord of a rock."

"That is true," said Fergus quickly, "Deirdrê has justice for what she says. But there is truth in what I say also, and it is a truth which the sons of Usna know, and will act by, that a man longs to see the land which is his own land or the land of his adoption. And were not Naois and Ailne and Ardan among us as children and as boys and as youths, and are they not heroes of

the Red Branch? Surely, it is a good thing for a man to see his own land each day, and to rejoice therein?"

"We have two lands," interrupted Ardan, "we who are of both Alba and Erin. Nevertheless, it would ill befit us not to look upon ourselves of the Red Branch first and foremost. So if Naois is ready to go with thee, so also are Ailne and I myself."

"I am ready," said Naois, though he kept his eyes away from those of Deirdrê.

"And ye know that my guaranty is sure?" added Fergus.

"It is sure," said Naois.

That night all were full of joyous pleasure, save only Deirdrê, who in her heart knew that the shadowy feet of Fate were all about them, and that she at least and perhaps none other there would ever again see Alba.

On the morrow all set sail. As they left the beautiful shores, than which for sure there are none more beautiful in all the realms of the Gael, Deirdrê took her harp and sat back among the deerskins in the stern of the galley and sang:

"*Ionmhuin tir, an tir ud shoir—*
Alba go na h'-iongantaibh;
Nocha ttiocfainn aiste ale,
Muna ttagainn le Naoise,"

and for eight other verses in the old ancient Gaelic that has lived in her lament till this day:[11]

Dear is this land to me, dear is this land:
O Alba of the lochs!
Sure I would not be sailing sad from thy foam-white sand
Were I not sailing with Naois for the Irish strand.

Dear is the Forest Fort and high Dunfin,
And Dûn Sween, and Innis Drayno—
Often with Naois have I striven to win
To the wooded heights of these—and now we go
Far hence, and to me it is a parting of woe.

O woods of Coona, I can hear the singing
Of the west wind among the branches green
And the leaping and laughing of cool waters springing,
And my heart aches for all that has been,
For all that has been, my Home, all that has been!

Fain would I be once more in the woods of Glen Cain,
Fain would I sleep on the fern in that place:
Of the fish, venison, and white badger's flesh I am fain
That plentifully we had there, or wherever our trail
Carried us, yea, I am fain of that place.

Glenmassan! O Glenmassan!
High the sorrel there, and the sweet fragrant grasses:
It would be well if I were listening now to where
In Glenmassan the sun shines and the cool west wind passes,
Glenmassan of the grasses!

Loch Etive, O fair Loch Etive, that was my first home,
I think of thee now when on the grey-green sea—
And beneath the mist in my eyes and the flying foam
I look back wearily,
I look back wearily to thee!

Glen Orchy, O Glen Orchy, fair sweet glen,
Was ever I more happy than in thy shade?
Was not Naois there the happiest of men?
O may thy beauty never fade,
Most fair and sweet and beautiful glade.

Glen of the Roes, Glen of the Roes,
In thee I have dreamed to the full my happy dream:
O that where the shallow bickering Ruel flows,
I might hear again, o'er its flashing gleam,
The cuckoos calling by the murmuring stream.

Ah, well I remember the Isle of the Thorn
In dark and beautiful Loch Awe afar:
Ah, from these I am now like a flower uptorn,
Who shall soon be more lost than a falling star,
And am now as a blown flame in the front of war!

Naois was sad when he heard this lament from the mouth of Deirdrê, and Ailne and Ardan looked at each other and whispered that it was the beginning of the end. Nevertheless, they did not fear to confront the days to come, for whatsoever the decrees of Fate may be a brave man does not draw back, but goes forward upon the way set before him. But Naois was in a dream, and so heeded little, content too to chide Deirdrê because that she laid so much stress on vain imaginings.

The voyage was a swift and good one, and even Deirdrê's heart beat the quicker when once more she stood on the soil of Erin, her own land. In three days thereafter they came within sight of the Dûn of Borrach,

and Fergus MacRossa was glad, for soon he would be able to see Concobar the king, and tell him how great was his success.

It is a strange thing that a man such as Fergus Honeymouth could be so blind. Yet had he ever believed in the kinglihood of Concobar, and it was not till he reached the house of the son of Cainte that he knew in truth how the high king meant to play him false, and mayhap to deal treacherously with the sons of Usna. For after Borrach had greeted them all with affection and heartsome pleasure, he told them that word had come from Concobar that they were to press forward without delay, so great was the king's longing to see them again, and so deep was his love for three of the noblest of the knights of the Red Branch. "But upon thee, Fergus MacRossa, I have a feast made ready, a festival of weeks, and thou knowest it is *geas* upon thee not to refuse any feast made for thee: and so as thou wouldst avoid putting shame upon me and deep disgrace upon thyself, thou must abide here with me."

At that, Fergus flushed a deep red,[12] and was filled with anger. Yet could he not refuse, for his *geas* was sacred: and no man of that age dared break that bond.

So he turned to those with him, and asked what was now to be done.

"Let this be done," said Deirdrê: "either forsake the sons of Usna, or keep to thy feast-bond."

"My feast-bond I must keep, Deirdrê, yet will I not forsake the sons of Usna. My guaranty is known for sure: but over and above that I will send with them, and with thee, my two sons, Illann the Fair and Buine the Fiery, as further warranty."

But at these words Naois turned away with a scornful smile.

"It is not at thee or thy feast-bond I smile, O Fergus," he said, "but at thy protection, good though thy sons be. For, by the Sun and Wind, I have never yet had need of any man to protect me, and go now, as ever before, confident in my own valour and might: and this I say not boastingly, but openly, so that Concobar and all Uladh may know it."

Thereafter Deirdrê and the sons of Usna left the house of Borrach, and fared southward, with Illann the Fair and Buine in their company. As for Fergus, he cursed his bond, but nevertheless assured himself, for, as he said over and over, if the whole five provinces of Erin were assembled on one spot, they would not be able to break the solemn pledge of his guaranty.

But on the way Deirdrê urged advice upon Naois and his brothers.

"Let us go," she said, "to the isle of Cullen, between Erin and Alba, and there await the day when Fergus will fulfil his bond. In that way he shall still keep the obligation of his *geas*, and yet we shall escape the evil that I know well awaiteth us."

"That we cannot do," answered the sons of Usna, "for we are in honour bound now to the king. Moreover, we have the guaranty of Fergus MacRossa."

"It was an ill day when we came here trusting to that word," Deirdrê replied: but said no more then.

At dusk they reached the White Cairn on Sliav-Fuad, and it was not till after they had left the watch-tower behind them that Naois saw that Deirdrê was no longer of their company. So he retraced his way, and came upon her sleeping a deep sleep, though she awoke suddenly as he drew near.

"Is sleep so heavy upon thee, fair queen?" he asked, when he saw her startled eyes and pale face.

"I was weary, Naois. Yet it is not weariness that has done this, but a dream. I dreamed a terrifying and dreadful thing. I saw thee and Ailne and Ardan and Illann the Fair, but on not one of these was the head remaining, but only on Buine the Fiery."

"And what will be the meaning of that, Deirdrê?"

"That Buine will leave ye ere death comes, and that a bloody death will be upon each. Naois, I pray of thee that thou wilt go straightway to Dûn Delgan, where the great and noble lord Cuchulain is, and abide with him for a while. There we shall be safe. Listen, I pray thee: I see thine own shadow creeping up thee, and a dark cloud overhead, and a cloud of clotted blood it is by the same token."

"Fair woman, there is some guile upon thy delicate thin lips. Why shouldst thou see evil everywhere? Be assured that neither I nor Ailne nor Ardan will turn aside from our quest of Concobar the king."

Deirdrê sighed, and remembered some old wisdom she had heard from Lavarcam: that if misfortune will not come to a man swiftly, he will seek it and take it by the great boar-fangs and compel it to come against him.

But on the morrow, as they came within sight of Emain Macha, once more she gave counsel.

"Ye know well, Naois and Ailne and Ardan, that in Emain Macha are three fair great houses of the king: that in one he himself is, with the nobles of Uladh who are his own following, and that in another are

the wayfarers of the Red Branch, and that in a third are the women. Now I warn ye of this thing: that if Concobar welcome us into his own house and among the nobles of Uladh, all will be well: but that if he send us to the house of the Red Branch, that will mean a disastrous end to thee and to me."

They said nothing to that, and when they came late into Emain Macha they knocked at the gates of Concobar's house.

The messengers told the king that the sons of Usna, and Deirdrê, and the two sons of Fergus MacRossa, were without: whereupon he asked of those about him in what state of provision and comfort was the house of the Red Branch, and on hearing that there was abundance of food and drink and comfort, he bade the messengers return and conduct the newcomers to that place.

When that message was given, Deirdrê again gave counsel: but Illann the Fair was wroth thereat, and the others yielded. As for Naois, he said only:

"Great is thy love, Deirdrê, queen of women: but great also is thy fearfulness."

At that Deirdrê smiled gravely, but said no more. Only in her heart she remembered what Lavarcam, in bitter irony, had told her once, that when a man foresaw evil and forefended it he was wise and strong in

his courage, but that if a woman did the same she was timorous and whim-borne.

In the house of the Red Branch the strangers were rendered all honour. Generous and pleasant foods and bitter cheering drinks were supplied to them, so that the whole company was joyful and merry, save the sons of Usna, and Deirdrê, who were weary with their journeying.

Thus after they had eaten and drunken, Naois and Deirdrê lay down upon high couches of white and dappled fawn-skins, and played upon the gold and ivory chess-board.

It was at this time that a secret messenger came from Concobar to tell him if Deirdrê were as beautiful as when she fled from Erin. This messenger was no other than Lavarcam. The woman embraced Deirdrê tenderly, and kissed the hands and brow of Naois. Then, looking upon them through her tears, she said:

"Of a surety it is not well for ye twain to be playing thus upon the second dearest thing in all the world to Concobar, Deirdrê being the dearest, and ye having taken both from him, Naois, and now ye twain being in his house and in his power. And this I tell you now, that I am sent hither by Concobar to see if Deirdrê has her form and beauty as

it was of old. Thy beauty then was a flame before his eyes, Deirdrê, and now it will be as a torch at his heart."

Suddenly Deirdrê thrust the chess-board from her.

"I have the sight upon me," she said in a strange voice with a sob in it.

"And what is that sight, my queen?" asked Naois.

"I see three torches quenched this night. And these three torches are the three Torches of Valour among the Gael, and their names are the names of the sons of Usna. And more bitter still is this sorrow, because that the Red Branch shall ultimately perish through it, and Uladh itself be overthrown, and blood fall this way and that as the whirled rains of winter."

Then taking the small harp by her side, she struck the strings and sang:

A bitter, bitter deed shall be done in Emain to-night,
And for ages men will speak of the fratricidal fight;
  And because of the evil done, and the troth unsaid,
Emain of dust and ashes shall cover Emain the White.

Of a surety a bitter thing it is thus to be led
Into the Red Branch house, there to be rested and fed,
  And then to be feasted with blood and drunken with flame,
And left on the threshold of peace silent and cold and dead.

The three best, fairest, and noblest of any name,
Are they all to be slain because of a woman's fame?
Alas! it were better far there were dust upon my head,
And that I, and I only, bore the heavy crown of shame.

At that Naois was silent awhile. He knew now that Deirdrê was right. He looked at his brothers: Ailne frowned against the floor, Ardan stared at the door, with a proud and perilous smile. He looked at Illann the Fair and at Buine the Fiery: Buine drank heavily from a horn of ale, with sidelong eyes, Illann muttered between his set teeth.

"This only I will say, Deirdrê," Naois uttered at last, "that it were better to die for thee, because of thy deathless beauty, than to live for aught else. As for what else may betide, what has to be will be."

"I will go now," said Lavarcam, "for Concobar awaits me. But, sons of Usna and sons of Fergus, see ye that the doors and windows be closed, and if Concobar come against ye treacherously may ye win victory, and that with life to ye all."

With that Lavarcam left. Swiftly she sought Concobar, and told the king that it was for joy she knew now that the three heroes, the sons of Usna, had come back to Erin to dwell in fellowship with the Ardree and the Red Branch, but that it was for sorrow she had to tell that Deirdrê the

Beautiful was no longer fair and comely in form and face, but had lost her exceeding loveliness, and was now no more than any other woman.

At first Concobar laughed at that; then as his jealousy waned he thought with sorrow of the loss of so great beauty; and then again his spirit was perturbed. So he sent yet another messenger on the same errand.

This was a man named Treandhorn. Before Concobar sent him to the house of the Red Branch he said:

"Treandhorn, who was it that slew thy father and thy brother?"

"Thou knowest, O King, that it was Naois, son of Usna, who slew them."

Concobar smiled. "Now," he said, "go and do my behest."

When Treandhorn reached the house, he found all the doors and windows closed and barred. Then fear seized him, for he knew that the sons of Usna were on guard, and would have wrath upon them.

Nevertheless, still more did he fear to go back to Concobar with nought to tell him.

So the man, descrying a narrow window at one side, climbed to it from an unyoked chariot that was near, and looked in. He saw Naois and Deirdrê talking each to each in low voices, where they lay upon the white

and dappled fawn-skins, with the gold and ivory chess-board between them. He smiled grimly, when he saw how great and noble and kingly Naois seemed, and how more wonderful and beautiful than ever were the wonder and beauty of the eyes and face and form of Deirdrê.

It was the last time he smiled. At that moment Naois glanced upward. Swift as thought he lifted a spiked and barbed chess-man and hurled it at the man's eye. Treandhorn fell backward, but rose at once and fled, with his right eye torn and blind for evermore.

When he came to the king and told his tale, and how Naois was like a king indeed, and Deirdrê more beautiful by far than she had been of old, Concobar sprang to his feet. A red light came into his eyes, and he threw back his head and laughed; and at that laughing every man there knew that his madness was come upon him, and that the blood-thirst was already sweating upon many swords.

"Ultonians," he cried, "will ye do the will of your king?"

"That will we!" they answered with a great shout.

"Then come ye, and all your followers and vassals, and surround the house of the Red Branch, and set it in a forest of red flames,

and if any run from out thereof put them to the sword." As all ran swiftly from the king's fort, a high terrible voice was heard. It was that of the dying Cathba the ancient Druid, and what he cried thrice was: "The Red Branch perisheth! Uladh passeth! Uladh passeth!"

But none heard him or paid heed, save only Lavarcam, who in that bitter crying knew well that the end was come.

In a brief while thrice three hundred men surrounded the fort of the Red Branch, and set red flames about it; and thrice three hundred more made haste to join them.

There was a mighty onset at the first led by Buine the Fiery, who slew many, and quenched the fires, and threw the Ultonians into confusion.

"Who is the hero who has done this?" cried Concobar.

"It is I, Buine Borbruay, the son of Fergus MacRossa."

"I will give thee great bribes, Buine, if thou wilt forsake these robbers of my wife that was to be."

"What are thy bribes?"

"I will give thee a cantred of land at thine own choice, and I will make thee my chosen comrade, and thou shalt be as next to the king."

Then Buine the Faithless laughed and said: "Better the honours of a king than the thanks of dead men," and with that, for all the pledged guaranty of Fergus and the troth of his own word, he went over unto Concobar.

But when Illann the Fair heard of this he was wroth. He saw the bitter smile on the lips of Deirdrê, and he swore that he would not desert those upon whom lay the protection of his father's guaranty.

Meanwhile Ardan lay, dreaming with a proud smile against the fire; and, upon the deerskins near the couch of Deirdrê, Ailne and Naois played at chess, for little did they care to heed the treacherous valour of the Ultonians. They knew, too, that their hour was come; and being kingly, gave no thought to that little thing.

But Illann called the troops together and fared forth, and made so deadly an onslaught that he slew three hundred of Concobar's men. Then he quenched the fires, and went back to the fort and to where Ailne and Ardan were playing together.

"Is that rain that is making a noise without?" said Ailne to Naois.

"No; it is a humming of gnats," answered Naois. "Let us play on."

"My fate is heavy upon me, Naois and

Ailne," said Illann the Fair. "I have done well by thee, but I feel the heavy hand of fate is against me, and who can withstand fate?"

"No one," Naois answered later, when he had thought upon his play. At that Illann the Fair drank a drink,[13] and went out again. The fires had been quenched, and there was a deep darkness. So he bade each man take a torch, and then all set furiously again upon the Ultonians.

It was then that Concobar bethought him of his son Fiacha the Fair, who was born on the same night as Illann the Fair. There was life to the life, or death to the death, in that.

So he called Fiacha, and bade him strive with Illann, and gave him the three famous weapons of the royalty of Uladh — the moaning Orchaoin, and the terrible Corrthach, and the Notched-Bow.

But for all his enchanted weapons Fiacha did not prevail, and after a great and wonderful fight, which was girt about by a strange sighing, the sighing being the breath of the pulses of the watching host, Illann drove him to the ground where he crouched behind the shelter of his shield. Easily then he might have slain him but for this: —

The moaning Orchaoin made so great and

terrible a voice that it was heard afar off. The Three Ceaseless Waves of Erin heard it, and roared responsive, so that all the coasts shook with their thunder: the Wave of Toth (*Tuaithe*), the Wave of Clidna (*Cliodhna*), and the Wave of Rudhraya (*Rudhraighe*). There was a great Dûn on these coasts, named Dûn Tobairce, and there Conall Cernach the son of Amergin lived: and when he heard the roaring of the Three Waves of Erin, he knew that Concobar was in dire distress.

And that moaning of Orchaoin brought Conall Cernach on his magic steed that could fly through the night. He had with him his great sword "Blue Blade," and when he came to the place of the strife he moved swiftly up behind Illann the Fair, and plunged "Blue Blade" into the back, and through the heart, and out at the breast of the hero.

But when Conall Cernach heard from Illann's own lips what he had done, he was filled with wrath and grief.

"Thy faithless summons shall avail nought," he cried into the torchlit darkness where Concobar was; and with that he took his sword, and severed from its body the head of Fiacha the son of Concobar, and tossed it towards the king. Then, turning his back upon the host, he departed as he had come.

With the death of Illann the Fair, the Ultonians once more took heart. They surrounded the Red Branch fort, and again set red flames leaping against it.

Then Ardan came forth: laughing lightly, and with a proud joy.

The Ultonians saw then what it was to perish as mown grass. And when he had slain five times fifty, his arms grew weary.

"How many did Illann the Fair slay in that onslaught of his?" he asked.

"Thrice five score," he was told.

So Ardan slew two score and ten more, and then another score, for it did not befit so great a hero to slay less than an Ultonian champion, noble as Illann the Fair was.

When he was tired, he went into the fort, and told Ailne that there was still fresh carrion enough for a wild-hawk to glut its thirst with.

So Ailne rose from the chess-board and drank a drink, and went out, and did among the Ultonians even as Ardan had done, although he slew a score more, for he was older than Ardan, and so it did not befit him to put the stiffness and the silence upon fewer men.

Two-thirds of the night were now gone, yet Concobar did not withstay his wrath. For now the whole host of the Ultonians

was gathered together, and he thought to have victory at the last.

But at their great shouting and the higher leaping of the flames Naois rose. He kissed Deirdrê, then he drank a drink, and went out against the Ultonians.

In that hour thrice three hundred men grew cold and stiff.

Then he slew five score more.

"Go to Concobar," he said to a man, "and tell him that he has lost a thousand men over and above the hundreds slain by Illann the Fair and Ailne and Ardan. And now let him come to me himself."

But when Concobar heard that, he sent a messenger to Lavarcam to ask if Cathba the Druid were yet dead; and when he heard that he was not, he bade that the old man should be brought to him on a litter.

When Cathba was brought, he asked if the king meant death to the sons.

"I swear I mean no death," said Concobar; "but only honourably to subdue them and to obtain Deirdrê. And so I pray of thee to put an enchantment upon them, otherwise they will slay every Ultonian in the land."

So Cathba raised himself, and put an enchantment between the Sons of Usna and the host of the Ultonians. That enchantment was a hedge of spears, taller than the

tallest spear-reach, and more thickset than thorns on a bramble-bush.

But Naois and Ailne and Ardan put their shields about Deirdrê, and came forth from the blazing house, and cleft a way through the hedge of spears, and, laughing loud, garnered a red harvest among the swaying corn of the Ultonian host.

Then there was a strange roaring heard, and a vast and terrible flood came pouring from the hills. The Ultonians fled to the high ground, but Deirdrê and the sons of Usna were cut off by the rushing waters.

Soon the flood rose to their waists, but then it ceased rising.

"The wind will soon blow," whispered Deirdrê, "and then the flood will rise, and we shall be drowned."

Naois answered nothing, but raised her in his arms, and kissed her thrice upon the lips. Then he put her upon his left shoulder, where she sat with her white arms round his neck.

There was a smile in the blue eyes of Naois.

The flood now subsided, but the sons of Usna could not move, for their feet were in a morass. On a dry spit of land close to them a man walked. This man was Maine of the Red Hand, a man of Lochlin, in the train of Concobar.

Concobar had bidden some hero go forth and slay the sons of Usna. But none would stir. A deep shame burned in all. But Maine's father and two brothers had been slain by Naois, and he said he would do likewise unto the sons of Usna.

When he drew near, Ardan spoke.

"Slay me first," he said, "for I am the youngest of the sons of Usna: and it may be that with my death the tides of fortune may flow again."

"That cannot be," said Naois. "Here is the sword which Manannan, the son of Lir, gave me, and that cannot leave any remains of blow or stroke. Let this man Maine take it, and strike at us at one and the same time, so that not one of us may have the shame and sorrow of seeing the other beheaded."

And so it was. But while the man reached for the sword, Deirdrê sprang from the shoulder of Naois, and strove to kill Maine of the Red Hand. With a blow he reeled her aside, and then whirled the great sword of Manannan on high.

There was a flash in the air, and then the heads of the three fairest and noblest heroes of Alba fell. There was a long and terrible silence, till suddenly the whole host of Uladh broke into lamentation. Only Concobar

stood leaning on his sword, and stared at the stillness that was now fallen upon the House of Usna.

But already afar off Deirdrê had descried the champion Cuchulain, and she fled towards him.

"Thou shalt be safe with me, beautiful one," he said. "Tell me what thou wantest me to do."

"I do not wish to live, but I wish to live yet a brief hour, and not to be taken in shameful life before the eyes of Concobar." So the twain returned to where the dead lay. Deirdrê fell upon her knees, and spread out the glory of her hair, and put her lips to the blood-wet lips of Naois.

Then she rose, and looking upon the silent Ultonians, chanted this chant:

Is it honour that ye love, brave and chivalrous Ultonians?
Or is the word of a base king better than noble truth?
Of a surety ye must be glad, who have basely slain honour
In slaying the three noblest and best of your brotherhood.

Ardan the Proud, where now lies his yellow hair?
Ailne the Comely, where now stare his sightless eyes?
Naois, the king of men, where now is his might, his glory?
Where are the sons of Usna whom ye swore to honour?

Let now my beauty that set all this warring aflame,
Let now my beauty be quenched as a torch that is spent—
For here shall I quench it, here, where my loved one lies,
A torch shall it be for him still through the darkness of death.

And with that Deirdrê stooped, and lifted the head of Naois, and cleaned it of blood and foam, and the sweats of death, and kissed the eyes and the lips, and put her love upon the dear face, and her sorrow upon it, and her grief upon it, and put it to her white breast, and to her lips again, and gave it again her grief and her love.

Then at the bidding of Cuchulain three graves were digged. In each grave a son of Usna was placed, and as each stood there his head was placed upon his shoulders.

But the grave of Naois was made wider. Deirdrê stood in it, and held his hands in hers, and put her lips often to his lips, and often whispered to him.

One other death there was in that hour, and in that place.

Cathba the Druid died there: and again he cried: "*The Red Branch perisheth! Uladh passeth! Uladh passeth!*"

And so it was. On the morrow Emain Macha fell before a great host, and was

thenceforth a place of ruin and wind-eddied dust. The Red Branch became as scattered leaves, and were no more. And Uladh was given over to blood and rapine, and. Concobar died in a madness of grief, and throughout Erin for many years the tides of death rose and fell.

But the sons of Usna slept, and the world dreams still of the beauty of Deirdrê.

NOTES

NOTES

In my renderings of this the most famous of the three famous ancient Gaelic tales, collectively known as "The Three Sorrows of Story-Telling" (*Tri Thruaighe na Scéalaigheachta*), I have followed Professor Eugene O'Curry (*In Atlantis, Manners and Customs*, and *MS. Materials*); Dr. Douglas Hyde (*The Three Sorrows of Story-Telling*, translated into English verse); Dr. Joyce (*Old Celtic Romances*); Dr. Cameron (*Reliquiæ Celticæ*); Alexander Carmichael (*Trs. Gael. Socy. of Inverness*); Dr. Angus Smith (*Loch Etive and the Sons of Uisnach*).

These tales have often been retold in prose and verse; and particular intention should be made of the metrical versions of Dr. Douglas Hyde, Dr. Robert Joyce, and Dr. John Todhunter.

Much the most ancient of the "Three Sorrows" is the tale of the Sons of Turenn. Professor O'Curry's version in *Atlantis* is the basis of all other modern renderings. The period of this tale belongs to mythological times. "The Children of Lir" may be taken as a connecting link between the mytholog-

ical and prehistoric and Christian periods. The tale of "Deirdrê" is by far the best known in Gaelic Scotland, and is still the favourite ancient tale throughout all countries of the Gael.

The reader who wishes further information should consult in particular Professor Eugene O'Curry; Dr. Cameron, in *Reliquiæ Celticæ;* Dr. Joyce, in *Old Celtic Romances;* and Dr. Douglas Hyde, in his delightful and deservedly popular little volume.

Readers familiar only with the Irish versions of this beautiful old tale should also consult the important variants given by Dr. Cameron and Mr. Alexander Carmichael. Dr. Angus Smith also gives a good digest, and readers interested in the Scottish wayfarings of Deirdrê and Naois will find the details given there more or less specifically.

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1 *Alba.* That is, Gaelic Scotland, and here in particular Argyll.

2 Ulster.

3 This song, adapted to Macha, is founded upon a portion of the poem by Coel O'Neamhain, in honour of a beautiful queen named Crede, as translated by Professor Sullivan and others.

4 Given as in the Gaelic: *ciugear agus tri fichead agus tri chead.* Large numbers are in Gaelic invariably built up thus (instead of, for example, as here, four

hundred and sixty). In an old Irish-Gaelic version the particular number here is given as "five and three score above six hundred and one thousand" (*i. e.*, 1,760).

5 In old Gaelic, *Derdriu:* a name said to mean a signal of alarm, or Menace.

6 The Gaelic original is *Beanchaointeach* (*Banchainte*) *Conchubhar fein*, etc., and means literally Concobar's Conversation-woman, which perhaps might be rendered as "gossip."

7 I have adopted here, as more euphonious, the name of Usna (Uisneach). The other names are *Naoise; Ainnle* (Ailne, Ailthos) meaning 'beautiful;' and *Ardan* meaning 'pride.'

8 The Cruithne, or Picts, had their chief stronghold at Beregonium, overlooking the Bay of Selma, not far from the mouth of Loch Etive, below the Falls of Lora, in West Argyll.

9 To this day, the Highlander of Western Argyll and of Inverness-shire is familiar with the Fort of the Sons of Usna, above one of the lochs which constitute, what is now known as the Caledonian Canal.

10 Western India.

11 This is a free paraphrase of the original as given by Dr. Cameron in the *Reliquiæ Celticæ*. The original consists of nine short quatrains. In the second, the names mentioned are Dûn Fiodha, Dûn Fionn, Innis Droighin, and Dûn Suibhne. In the following quatrains the old and modern names are practically identical. The modern Glendaruel was formerly Glendaruay (Gleann da Ruadh), the Glen of the Two Roes, or Glennaruay (Gleann na Ruadh), the Glen of the Roes. Innis Droighin is again alluded to in the last verse. It is now called Innis Draighneach, meaning the Island of Thorns, and is situate in Loch Awe.

12 Literally "O d'chuala Feargus sin, do rinneadh rothnuall corcra dhe o bhonn go bathas." (When Fergus heard this, he became a crimson mass from the foot-sole to the face.)

13 *Agus d'ibh deoch, agus tainigh amach aris*, etc., "and he drank a drink," etc.

A few notes as to the less familiar of the Gaelic names introduced in the foregoing pages may aptly be given here, and the more conveniently in alphabetical order.

AILNE. The older forms are *Ailna* and *Ailtě*. The latter (pronounced Anlă) is probably the right name. It is said to signify beauty.

ALBA. The Gaelic for Scotland. The genitive of this word is Alban, whence the familiar English word for Scotland, Albyn.

BANBA. This was one of the three ancient names of Ireland — Banba, Fola, and Eiré — the names of three famous queens of antiquity. It is from the last that Ireland derives its best known Gaelic name.

CONOR (*Connachar*). The oldest form of this famous Gaelic name, so common in Ireland, is Concubair, or Concobar. Dr. Hyde says that Concubair is properly pronounced Cunnhoor, but doubtless Concobar is closer to the ancient usage.

CUCHULAIN. The oldest form of the name of this great Gaelic hero is Cuchulaind. The name is pronounced Coo-hoolin, whether spelled according to any of the Irish-Gaelic variants or as to the Scottish Cuthullin — but sometimes, as in Skye, Coolin. It is not the real name of the hero in question. The word signifies the hound of Culainn, and innumerable refer-

ences to Cuchulain are found throughout early Irish literature simply as The Hound. He was a native prince of Ulster, and lord of the district of Muirthemne, lying between and including the present towns of Dundalk and Drogheda, now called the County of Louth, where his chief residence was named Dûn Delga (Dundalk). This celebrated hero, the champion of the knights of the great order of Gaelic chivalry, known as the Red Branch, was the son of Soalte, or Sualtam, and of Decteré, sister of the celebrated Irish king, Concobar mac Nessa (a contemporary of Christ). His name was Setanta, but he was commonly known as Cu-Culainn, the Hound of Culaan, who was his instructor and warsmith to King Concobar. The most famous of the Knights of the Red Branch at this time were the heroes known as Fergus mac Róigh, Conall Cearnach, Fergus mac Leité, Curoi mac Dairé, and Cuchulain mac Soalte.

Dagda, or The Dagda. This is a purely mythical personage, and is one of the ancient Gaelic divinities, among whom he occupies a place somewhat akin to that of Jupiter in the Latin Pantheon.

Dedannan. Pronounced Day-Donnan. This is the colloquial form of the Tuatha-De-Danann ; that is, the elder semi-divine inhabitants of Ireland, mostly mythical, and in some cases euhemerised. They became the Hidden People, or People of the Hills, of ancient Gaelic legend, and later the Fairies of popular tradition, though now the drift of poetic thought is towards a restoration of the Tuatha-De-Danann to their old spiritual significance and empery. The term signifies the Divine Progency of Ana, a mysterious and perhaps supreme ancient goddess. The Dedannans were also called The Deena-Shee (Daoine-Sidhe), or Fairy Folk ; the Aes-She, or People of the Hills ; the Marcra-Shee, or Fairy Cavalcade ; and the Sloo-She (Sluagh-Sidhe), or Fairy Host.

Dûn. This word is properly pronounced Doon, though in Gaelic Scotland generally Dûn. It signifies a fortress or great fortified dwelling or encampment, and should not be confused with Rath, which is more what we would call the homestead, hamlet, village, or township, according to circumstances; or, with Lis, or Lios, a smaller fort probably corresponding to what we call a keep.

Emania. This is simply the Latinized form of *Emhain*, or *Emain*, the capital of North Ireland in the ancient days. The name is variously pronounced as Emain, Avvin, and Yew-an or Yow-an.

Eric. Originally eiric, pronounced ayric. Signifies literally a fine or blood-money, and is perhaps best rendered in English by the word ransom.

Felim. This name is more familiar as Phelim. The modern Gaelic is Phelimy, and the older, Pedlimid.

Geasa. Pronounced Gassa. It is the plural of *geis* (often written *geas*), and signifies oath-bound injunctions or undertakings. In the old days for a man to be under *geasa* meant that he was solemnly bound to do such and such a thing, or, as it might be, to refrain; and the bond once taken could not be broken without loss of honour.

Illann. This frequent name of Illann, or Illan, is identical with Ullin, so familiar in Scotland through the famous poem of "Lord Ullin's Daughter."

Lir. Pronounced sometimes Lirr, but generally Lear.

Lochlann. A general name for the whole of Scandinavia, including, of course, Denmark, and not, as sometimes stated, of Norway only.

Manannan. Pronounced Mon-on-awn and also *Mân-an*. He is the Poseidon of Gaelic mythology,

but holds a more mysterious and more potent position in the Gaelic Pantheon than his classical congener.

MAEV. The name of this most famous queen of antiquity is variously spelt. The original is Meadb, or Medbh, and is properly pronounced Mave (rhyming with wave).

MURHEMNE. The original of this is Magh Muirteimne, pronounced Moy-mwir-hev-na. It is the plain from the Boyne to near Carlingford.

MOYLE. This is the commonest pronunciation of the old Gaelic Maol, though the word is best known in Scotland as Mull (from the Mull of Cantyre). It is applied to the sea between Cantyre and Ulster.

NAOIS. Originally Naisi ; later Naoise ; and commonly pronounced Neeshă or Nāyshă.

ULAD, or ULADH. The old name of Ulster, of which Ultonia is the Latinized form. Ulad is properly pronounced Ulla.

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